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ORVILLE PECK HAS NOTHING TO HIDE

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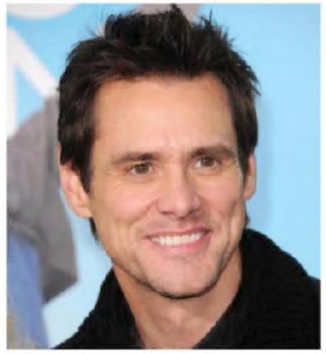

Jim Carrey

For playboy's Equality Issue, our new contributing cartoonist chose to honor the late civil rights activist and public servant Elijah Cummings with an illustration titled For Goodness Sake. "I drew Elijah Cummings because he stood for love, fairness and truth. He embodied what is left of our endangered moral conscience," says the award-winning actor. Carrey will soon return to season two of Kidding and release his semi-autobiographical novel, Memoirs and Misinformation.

Shan Boodram

The pains of polyamory, bottom dysmorphia and thinking about sex 24/7: Boodram tackles these and other sexual quandaries with wit and empathy as this issue's guest Playboy Advisor. This isn't her first stint in the hot seat: In May, the certified sexologist and author of The Game of Desire hosted a live session of Playboy Advisor at the Playhouse, our pop-up magazine event, where she offered modern answers to questions from 1960s-era playboys.

Jerry Saltz

After moderating The Art of Sexuality, a Playboy-hosted art talk in New York City, the senior art critic for New York magazine signed on to interview revolutionary artist JR for us (Portraits for the People). "JR is a weapon of mass artistic destruction and retinal pleasure amid the corruption and crises of our Western democracy," says the Pulitzer Prize winner. His upcoming book How to Be an Artist sets out to convert his experience as a critic and lecturer into an accessible guide for the art novice.

Franklin Leonard

How did this producer, professor and CEO of the Black List, Hollywood's prestige incubator for filmmakers and screenwriters, go about guest-editing The Playboy Symposium on women, sex and cinema? "My approach was simple," he says. "Pass the microphone to a woman who knows the subject better than I." The result is a seven-page study by Kate Hagen, the Black List's director of community.

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Playmate Aviannah Élise
Photography by Jeston Brandon
No 31 | **February 2020**

"Baby, it's really cold outside."

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Behind the Lens

Nadia Lee Cohen, the mastermind behind both this issue's nostalgic cover and the ad campaign for Playboy's new fragrance, Make the Cover (coming March 2020), creates work with the instinct of a storyteller. That may explain why the British artist gravitates toward eccentric and striking characters who can effortlessly weave a narrative into her cinematic portraits. For the Equality Issue's cover story, *Once a Playmate, Always a Playmate*, Cohen used her lens to "focus a spotlight on age and photograph something I consider to be underrepresented in popular culture," she tells us. Cohen invited five Playmates across six decades — 1963 through 2012 — to help bring her vision to life. "I wanted to celebrate the original Playmates who helped shape and pioneer the brand."

Playboy's Freedom Fighters

In November, PEN America honored First Amendment attorney Theodore J. Boutrous Jr. with its Distinguished Leadership Award in recognition of his free speech advocacy. He has worked with comedian and 2018 *Playboy Interview* subject Kathy Griffin, who called Boutrous after the Department of Justice investigated her for conspiracy to assassinate the president; reporter Jim Acosta, who refused to yield his questioning of Trump; and playboy White House correspondent Brian Karem, whose press pass was revoked by Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham without cause. In August, Boutrous successfully sued the White House, arguing Karem's suspension violated the First and Fifth Amendments. We congratulate Boutrous on his award.

Giddy Up

For this edition of *Man in His Domain*, Marissa Moss attempts to capture just how captivating Orville Peck, the elusive cowboy, truly is. To further explore the masked musician's origins, Simon Hanselmann, creator of last issue's Megg's Pleasure, stepped in to illustrate an original comic (right). Visit Playboy.com to see more.

The Art Outsiders

"Sometimes outsiders make the most powerful insiders," says senior editor Elizabeth Suman, who united French "wallpaper artist" JR and *New York* magazine senior art critic Jerry Saltz for an in-depth conversation in our photo feature, *Portraits for the People*. Forgoing a traditional interview for a private tour of JR's exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, the two men bonded over their unconventional approaches to their crafts. "JR didn't go to art school and is becoming one of the most recognizable artists in the world," says Suman. "Jerry was a truck driver until he was 41, and recently won a Pulitzer. Each, in his own way, is bringing art to a new demographic and challenging what the art community could, and should, look like." The show's centerpiece, *The Chronicles of New York City*, features 1,128 New Yorkers displayed across 32 feet of museum real estate. The mural becomes even more impactful when viewers realize it's connected to an AR app, JR:murals, which features audio clips of each subject. Turn to page 118 to download the app and hear the playboy pages tell their story.

Remembering Stephanie Morris

Stephanie Morris, a talented photo editor who spent nearly 30 years working for playboy, passed away this fall. "I don't think Stephanie knew how good she was at her job," reflects Marilyn Grabowski, another former playboy photo editor. "We had a great team, and a lot of credit goes to Stephanie."

The Blond(ie) Bunny

Just a few years before Debbie Harry got her big break as the unapologetic frontwoman of Blondie, she did a stint as a Bunny at the New York Playboy Club. In her recent memoir, *Face It*, Harry touches on everything from Bunny-hood to bankruptcy to the band's breakup. To read more about her experience wearing the ears and tail, check out Diamond Days (page 209).

ORVILLE PECK

Man in His Domain

The man behind the mask has a voice of gold and nothing to hide. What will it take for a hidebound genre to embrace the new cowboy in town?

BY **MARISSA R. MOSS**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ALYSSE GAFKJEN**

The aptly named "party switch" featured in every room at the Dive Motel in Nashville has four options: sex, drugs, rock & roll and sleep. Orville Peck, in a pair of horse-print tighty-whities, is boogying to the sex station, which blasts 1970s R&B while a rotating disco ball shimmers in sparkly pink hues overhead. The lack of a television, plus the bright geometric wallpaper and deep shag carpeting, signals that this renovated roadside inn isn't the kind of place you visit for a family-friendly good time. But on this sweaty Tennessee afternoon the only thing splayed across the bed sheets is Peck's collection of handmade lace-up masks. Gold fringe, long red fringe, short cream fringe, mid-length pink fringe. Fringe galore, yee-haw, amen.

Peck fastens on one of his masks — which he hopes never to be seen in public without — pairing it with an embroidered Nudie-style suit. Someone suggests we crank up the party switch to drugs, which features trippy lights and sounds by hip-hop forefather Grandmaster Flash. The country artist is pleased, mostly with his outfit.

"I do like the Porter Wagoner look," Peck says, referring to the 1960s twangy crooner who made sparkly, chain-stitched getups part of his signature look. Wagoner, however — at least as far as we know — never cracked a whip while listening to "White Lines." The musician moves to another bedroom, this one featuring side-by-side bathtubs and more shag, to snap additional photos. He stands on a bed and gives a hearty crack to a long, vintage-leather lasso.

"I'm good with a whip," the superhero-like figure announces, an innuendo that would no doubt cause fidgeting across town on Music Row, the epicenter of Nashville's commercial country-music industry. While fluid sexuality has long been embraced in pop music, the naughtiest images to ship out of this town tend toward a tight pantsed Luke Bryan singing about "knockin' boots." For someone like Peck, who is openly gay, a career in mainstream country has almost always been out of reach. Just seven years ago, in 2013, country radio penalized Kacey Musgraves for alluding to kissing girls on "Follow Your Arrow"; the song never charted higher than 43 on Billboard's Country Airplay chart despite being named song of the year at the 2014 Country Music Association Awards. The genre, conventional wisdom would like you to believe, is conservative, and the only viable path for an aspiring artist who happens to embrace gayness is country-adjacent. But times are changing. Nashville is starting to demand a party switch.

"See," Peck says, flicking the whip in an impressive wave motion with a controlled snap of the wrist, all cowboy confident, "I told y'all."

Peck, who put out his debut LP, Pony, on Sub Pop in March, sings about relationships with men because that's who he is, not because he has an agenda. The sexiness in his songs comes more from a sonic palette that sometimes sounds like Chris Isaak than from character-playing. Much has been murmured about Peck's sexuality and his "subversive" role in country; almost as much has been made of his masked anonymity. All three aspects are captivating, for sure, but they represent a fraction of the whole: Peck speaks about being a gay man in country music not to spur a revolution but to find a role for folks like him in a genre that, historically, hasn't

been welcoming. If anything, he's a traditionalist at heart. Dolly Parton and Wagoner are his North Stars in a cosmos that also includes Merle Haggard. And no, Orville Peck isn't his real name, but no one makes a stink about Eilleen Regina Edwards, the woman we know as Shania Twain.

His photo shoot done, Peck, now in a T-shirt on the hotel patio, smokes a cigarette through his fringe, which is parted down the middle like a set of curtains. "I'm not setting out to be an instigator," he says. "In fact, my songwriting is probably more in line with traditional country than a lot of country now."

He's not wrong: Peck's songs don't imitate Haggard's per se, but neither do those of the subgenre that includes Sam Hunt and Florida Georgia Line crooning about women, pickup trucks and beer. When compared toe-to-toe with the brocountry groups that dominate popular radio, Peck is no more indie rock than they are hip-hop. But a fear lingers that queer singers like Peck are trying to warp country into another liberal bastion. Peck doesn't see it as a changing of the guard so much as an opportunity to be a part of what's been built.

Country's queens — Parton, in particular — were Peck's inspiration and role models, but he soon realized the genre as a whole wasn't ready to invite him in; it's an experience that's relatable for many people whose stories have been excluded from the country canon. It's not that people of color or queer people haven't had a role in Nashville's understructure; it's that their impacts have been diminished and muted. This isn't entirely the fault of country music itself. As Nadine Hubbs discusses in Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music, classism has resulted in the dismissal of country as the province of unsophisticated hillbillies.

"Even just a few banjo or fiddle notes," Hubbs writes, "can suffice to convey qualities including rusticity, Southernness, stupidity or lack of sophistication, and violent bigotry, especially racism and homophobia." When the middle and elite classes use the refrain "anything but country" to describe their musical interests, they're signaling not just personal taste but economic background and political affinity. Classifying country music as the antithesis of sophistication promotes the idea that it can't be appreciated by anyone who lacks white skin and a blue collar.

"I think the stigma that country music is made by a certain type of person, and is only for a certain type of person, is something perpetuated by big-wig old white men who run record labels and feel like that's how they can keep in control," says Peck, stubbing out his cigarette. "But look at Willie Nelson. That guy's a weed-smoking gay-rights activist."

"The problem is less about homophobia. It's a chauvinist problem."

The issue of otherness in country is further highlighted in the case of Lil Nas X, who came out as gay following the success of his 2019 hit, "Old Town Road." After he was nominated for a Country Music Association Award (for musical event of the year), a flood of national headlines erroneously declared him the first openly gay person to snag such an honor. In the past decade, openly gay artists Shane McAnally and Brandy Clark have been recognized by the CMAs. The media's lazy assumption speaks to the view of country as a "hillbilly" home where there can't possibly be space for queer folks, resulting in erasure by accident. Country's gay community hasn't always been heard, but it is rich, and critics often confuse the Music Row machine and country radio — where queer voices are indeed silenced — with the music makers themselves.

As the world considers more interpretations of sexuality and gender, and country music becomes a global commodity that needs to react to those trends, there's space in the expanding universe for a star like Peck. "Whether they even recognize the reasoning, I think a lot of gay people feel detached from country music," he says. "But marginalized people of any kind have to bushwhack and blaze our own trails a lot of the time. Those paths aren't there for us, and it's usually in the face of a lot of adversity or a lot of judgment."

It's a complicated balance to recognize the role queer people have played in country music and also acknowledge how they've been curbed. Peck knows this history well, from Lavender Country, the band credited with releasing the first gay country album in 1973 (Peck has sung with them), to Willie Nelson's 2006 version of the cowboy-lovin' anthem "Cowboys Are Frequently, Secretly Fond of Each Other" (Peck has covered it). His mask is reminiscent of Jimmy "Orion" Ellis, a 1970s and 1980s country singer with Presleyan vocals and an affinity for obscuring his face. Peck's masks are more SM than bedazzling like Ellis's, but a mask nonetheless signifies a love of showmanship.

"My introduction to country music was Dolly Parton when I was a kid, and I didn't know she was a real person," Peck says "I thought she was like Elvira or something, because she was this larger-than-life character. That's the country music I love. People always think I'm playing a character, but that's not it at all. It's about a super-heightened version of yourself to tell the story better, which is what Dolly does. She wears wigs — she's a drag queen, basically — but she sings these sincere, heartbreaking songs, and it's all very genuine. That's kind of what I try to do."

Although Peck maintains his mysterious persona, he hasn't made up a past that doesn't exist. He's an entertainer, not a myth. Peck grew up all over, with a father who was a sound engineer for glamrock bands including Suzi Quatro and a mother who valued creativity; he has two brothers. A trained ballet dancer and singer obsessed with David Bowie and cowboys, Peck had started performing by the age of 10. He taught himself to play guitar, performed in punk bands and studied the art of mask-making before recording Pony on Gabriola Island in British Columbia.

"I think most people want to discount me as a hipster who's dipping my toe into this yee-haw agenda," Peck says. "But the reality is, this has been me for a long time. This has been a dream of mine my whole life."

His country dream is coming to fruition at a time when change is increasingly unavoidable, at least in terms of integrating queer voices and supporting LGBTQ people. Miranda Lambert dedicated her song "All Kinds of Kinds" to WorldPride 2019, which she attended in New York City; Carrie Underwood's "Love Wins" hints apolitically at equality; and Maren Morris is a fierce and outspoken advocate, as are Musgraves and Margo Price. Nashville is also evolving: Its music community rallied fast and hard when former Arkansas governor and vocal homophobe Mike Huckabee joined the CMA Foundation's board in 2018. He resigned in less than 24 hours.

Newer artists like Brandon Stansell are leaning in to mainstream careers as queer people, following in the path of Ty Herndon and Chely Wright, who both came out years after their debuts but whose careers never benefited from their truths. On the indie end, acts such as Karen & the Sorrows, Trixie Mattel and Little Bandit are breaching the genre to make it more inclusive. Brandi Carlile, a queer artist and 2019 Grammy nominee for album of the year, is doubling down on her commitment to the genre, producing country records, singing duets with Dierks Bentley and forming the female supergroup the Highwomen.

"She's really changing the narrative," says Peck, who sees a link between how country music has historically sidelined women and how it currently treats the queer community. "I feel like the problem is less about homophobia. It's a chauvinist problem," he says. "Female musicians go through this all the time. The gatekeepers of country, as is the way with everything on this planet, tend to be conservative, straight white men. I think that's kind of ending. I really do believe it."

Peck has dreams too: of performing at the CMA Awards, singing at Nelson's ranch and, of course, appearing at the Grand Ole Opry. He thinks they'll all come true, because despite the mask, he has never been less hidden in his life.

"I genuinely feel like I'm on a horse riding into the sunset, on my own terms," he says before disappearing into the hotel room with his bed of masks. There's a cowboy battle raging in Nashville, and Peck has been practicing with his whip. ■

LEXI LUV

Model **@PLAYMATELEXILUV**

Photography by **BRUCE COLERO @BRUCECOLERO**
MUA **KYLE MCKELLAR @KYLEMAKEUPMCKELLAR**
Shoot Assistant **DANIELLE HAWKINS @DANYELLEHAWKINS**

Describe yourself in three words?
Sensual, magical, naughty

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Yes! Playboy has been a dream of mine to shoot with ever since I can remember!

What was it like starting out as a model?
Overwhelming but exciting!

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Trying to portray my personality through my modeling.

Describe your perfect day off when you are not modelling?
Lounging at the beach or pool, spending time with my friends!

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
City because I can always find a new adventure.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
Anywhere with a beautiful beach, hot weather. Hawaii or Bora Bora.

Do you have a secret talent?
Fire spinning.

A guilty pleasure?
Taking hundreds of selfies until I get the perfect picture.

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
See you again Wiz Khalifa.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
Bella which means beautiful in Italian

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
Always chase your dreams, and never stop! Every day is a blessing, help others as much as you can!

OPENER BY **GARY PERCIVAL**

On the need to shift the abortion rights debate from "My body, my choice!" to one that recognizes men as equal beneficiaries

BY **SHIRA TARRANT**

As a professor, a writer and an editor who has contributed to various texts on sexuality, including 2013's Men Speak Out: Views on Gender, Sex and Power and 2015's New Views on Pornography: Sexuality, Politics and the Law, I receive many unsolicited e-mails from men filled with provocative subject matter, confessions about private proclivities and various forms of the question "Am I normal?" When it comes to pornography specifically, men are eager to share their experiences and opinions. But when it comes to consent or sexual assault? Crickets. The same goes for the subject of abortion.

I've recently been posing a question to my male friends, and I'd like to ask playboy's male readers the same: Have you thought about abortion lately? You know, the one your girlfriend had in high school? Or maybe the woman was your fiancée, and her family was conservative and religious? Has a onenight stand (what was her name again?) ever texted you, asking for $300? Do you know for certain whether any of the women in your family have had abortions?

If you're a man, odds are you haven't had to spend much time reflecting on the personal benefits of abortion, including the numerous ways in which women's access to the safe and (for now) legal procedure enhances your life. Not giving much consideration to abortion, I would argue, is a double privilege of benefiting from abortion yet not being expected to talk about it. There's no #ShoutYourAbortion campaign for men on Instagram and no #YouKnowMe hashtag wielded by male activists on Twitter. When journalist Liz Plank asked men to describe their experiences with abortion on Twitter in May 2019, she received only a smattering of disclosures among the predictable pushback from anti-choice tweeters and trolls.

As things stand, women bear the stigma for aborting and the shame of disclosing it. With abortion rights regressing in many states, women now even face scrutiny from some feminists who believe they have a duty to speak about their abortions publicly.

Men, meanwhile, benefit from this emotional labor. A man who goes through an abortion with his partner isn't expected to defend that decision. Men are not expected to "shout" about it. Men do not have to indicate their experience with abortion on basic health forms that collect their personal medical history. Generally, physicians don't ask men about their engagement with previous pregnancies during a medical intake, a conversation that could be an opportunity to provide accurate reproductive-health information. Nobody assumes men are whispering their abortion stories over steins of beer. Men aren't expected to share their experiences with abortion during intimate conversations with their partners when deciding to create a family or remain child-free. Men's freedom to evade this scrutiny? It adds up to a lot of saved mental and emotional bandwidth.

And yet, nearly one in four women terminate a pregnancy by the time they turn 45. That means as many as one in four men may have experienced abortion. Where legal, abortion services are provided to women from all walks of life, all incomes and all religions. Fifty-nine percent of services are provided to women who are already mothers. While bodily integrity and the right to privacy are core to many legal debates (with the latter being the basis of Roe v. Wade) — and

Legal access to abortion services undoubtedly benefits any man whose sexual partner wants an abortion and safely receives one.

while the decision to terminate a pregnancy must remain the right of women whose bodies are affected — behind nearly every abortion stands a man. That raises a question: Why is one of the greatest human rights battles of our generation a gendered issue? And why aren't we as a society doing more to include men in the fight?

For one, it may be because men's experience with abortion is both understudied and underreported. Katie Watson, author of the 2018 Oxford University Press book Scarlet A: The Ethics, Law and Politics of Ordinary Abortion, coined the term *abortion beneficiary* to describe "people who didn't terminate a pregnancy themselves but benefited from the fact someone else did." As Watson explains, the web of abortion beneficiaries is vast. It includes men who, given options, intentionally choose parenthood. It includes men who have enjoyed sex without worrying about contraceptive failure. It includes men who haven't had to parent grandchildren when their son or daughter couldn't. It includes men who have gone on to pursue degrees and professions, and who have earned income and built wealth, because of a decision made by a girlfriend, wife or sexual partner years before.

Researchers at the University of Utah recently collected reported data from men who experienced a pregnancy a partner while under the age of 20 and compared the s of those who became fathers with those who were ab neficiaries. Their findings, published in the Journal of Ad Health in 2019, concluded that young men who avoided g teen fathers through abortion access had stronger educational futures. Twenty-two percent of men who were abortion beneficiaries went on to graduate from college, compared with only six percent of teen fathers, for example.

Of course, people should be able to have kids at the legal age — and be supported in doing so — notes the study's lead researcher, Bethany G. Everett. But our society and government don't do a good job of supporting new parents, teenaged or older. Neither do we do a good job of promoting maternal health and preventing neonatal death. Georgia consistently ranks among the worst in maternal mortality rates, with half the counties in the state having no ob-gyns. States with the highest rates of infant mortality — Ohio, Alabama and Mississippi, to name a few — have passed some of the country's most restrictive abortion bans. Women who are denied access to abortion are four times more likely to have incomes below the federal poverty level six months later.

What does this have to do with men's abortion benefits? All the sons of mothers who were able to choose the timing of their pregnancies received benefits to their health and well-being from the moment they were born, no matter the subsequent circumstances of their childhood.

This should not be misconstrued as justification for men to coerce women into having abortions. Rather, the research highlights that "restricting access to abortion may have negative consequences for men whose partners desire abortion but are unable to access services," according to Everett and her team. Stated from a different angle, legal access to abortion services undoubtedly benefits any man whose sexual partner wants an abortion and safely receives one.

Abortion has existed for thousands of years, but its ties to the societal control of women's bodies is more recent. From the 1600s through the early 1800s, abortion was not criminalized in America. This changed when male physicians began opposing abortions performed by nonphysicians, such as midwives, female healers and wise women who threatened male doctors' control over the medical industry. The procedure became even more controversial when newspapers started advertising abortion preparations in the mid-1800s. Abortion then turned into a moral issue — not because of disagreement over when life begins but because a still-puritanical society worried women would take advantage of abortion services to cover up extramarital affairs. By the early 1900s almost all 50 states had passed anti-abortion laws.

A century later, a stark gap between reality and the rhetoric of men who oppose abortion pervades the national debate over female reproductive health. Sixtyone percent of men say it should be legal in all or most cases, yet the most vocal anti-abortion legislators and pro life activists — those who are part of what Rolling Stone's Jamil Smith has termed "the forced-birth movement" — are also men.

They include many Republican politicians who have gone to great lengths to eradicate abortion access while privately benefiting from it, such as Scott Lloyd, former head of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. In 2004, as a law student, Lloyd wrote a paper comparing abortion to the Holocaust. According to Mother Jones, classmates recall this paper as "a manifesto," as if Lloyd were on a crusade. Since then, he has attempted to block a 17-year-old rape victim from obtaining an abortion and promoted crisis pregnancy centers, which are merely fronts for anti-choice activism. But as Mother Jones reported in 2018, a younger Lloyd once drove an ex-girlfriend to terminate a pregnancy for which he was responsible.

Republican congressman Tim Murphy of Pennsylvania, who co-sponsored a 20-week abortion ban, resigned in 2017 after news broke that he allegedly had pressured his mistress to terminate a pregnancy. U.S. Representative Scott DesJarlais of Tennessee, a former physician, proudly claims a 100 percent pro-life voting record yet has supported two abortions for his ex-wife and reportedly pressured a 24-year-old patient — his mistress — to terminate her pregnancy. November 2010 Playmate Shera Bechard sued Elliott Broidy, a former deputy finance chair of the Republican National Committee and one of California's top Republican Party fundraisers, for allegedly failing to make good on a $1.6 million coverup of their extramarital affair and, purportedly, an abortion.

These gentlemen had, in their minds, legitimate reasons for aborting a pregnancy; think "for therapeutic reasons" or "because the relationship wasn't going well." Their reasons may feel legitimate and deeply personal to them, but they are not unique. Such benefits are in fact among the reasons many people are staunchly pro-choice.

Given that research proves men benefit from abortion access, it's reasonable to expect men's engagement and political solidarity with pro-choice policy making. This is all the more pressing with the U.S. Supreme Court's inevitable review of Roe v. Wade. (The reversal of Roe could mean that "men go to college while women go to jail," Everett comments.) For the abortion-rights movement to result in true policy reform, and to maintain ongoing federal decriminalization, it must keep women at the center of the issue while also developing a broader focus on abortion as a non-gendered human rights issue.

The good news is that some male-led efforts to support abortion rights are under way. The MenEngage Alliance, for example, has partnered with the Sexual Rights Initiative to advance global human rights related to sexuality through advocacy with the United Nations. Men for Women's Choice, a decentralized grassroots network of male allies, encourages men around the world to support women's liberation efforts. The group explains, "All humans should have the right to autonomy and bodily integrity. For women and men, this often means the same thing, but for women it has an additional meaning: the ability to make choices regarding whether she will bear a child. We believe that no man should be able to force a woman to bear a child she does not want."

While strong forces are at work to preserve male power and advantage, anti-sexist men must continue to work against the tide and help cut through the myths and fallacies used to further women's political repression. Both forced abortion and denial of access are tools used by abusive men, according to researchers from the Guttmacher Institute and the UC Davis School of Medicine, who found that among women with a history of interpersonal violence, 74 percent experienced various forms of male control to influence their pregnancy outcome.

Galvanizing men in abortion rights politics makes sense. Women already carry the emotional and political labor around abortion rights, as well as the stigma for accessing the procedure. Women do the majority of heavy lifting to maintain access to reproductive options and sexual health care. But abortion is not a woman's issue. It is everyone's issue.

Something else to consider, if we wanted to flip the script: Anti-abortion legislation is nothing more than a penalty for having sex for both genders. It's terrifying, yes, but it's a reality more men might want to think about. ■

ARTWORK BY **ALPHACHANNELING**

PLAYBOY ADVISOR

Shan Boodram, clinical sexologist, YouTube star and author of The Game of Desire, taps her followers and offers unflaggingly positive advice to a woman who can't stop thinking about sex, a guy who can't get women to like him and others whose dilemmas may just be your own

Q: Is it normal to think about sex 24/7? I'm a 28-year-old woman who just got her *master's degree and is playing the field* while praying for a future partner — and I honestly feel that I'm addicted to sex. It just naturally seeps into my thoughts no matter what I'm doing, even at the most inappropriate times. When I envision my future partner, he's just as much of a freak as I am! Are there other men and women out there who feel the same things?—T.G.

A: We are all so much alike! The details may vary, but the root questions are pretty much the same: Am I normal? Am I worthy of being loved? Based on what you describe, the answer to both those questions is "Hell yes!" But if you're worried about your relationship with sex, ask yourself these questions: Is my sex drive in conflict with local laws? Has my sex drive blatantly impeded my progress in other areas of life? Is my sex drive often a point of moral contention in my relationships? If you answered yes to any of these, it might be a good idea to speak to a licensed professional — not because you're an addict per se but because balance isn't easy. If you answered no to all three, and you find that sex is by and large a joyful part of your life, just know that I've never met a single human being who claimed their sex life, libido, desires, opinions or beliefs were perfect. We are all trying to find love, make connections, grow, have some orgasms and make peace with ourselves (in no particular order). That said, there is absolutely a partner out there for you who can match your physical drive and meet your emotional qualifications; you just have to be intentional in finding him. As a woman who just completed her master's, you already get the formula: Know who you are, know where you fit best and immerse yourself in that community so you can align with like minds in the areas that matter to you the most.

Q: I'm a man in his 30s and have been in a relationship with someone I deeply love for two years. I recently met another woman who's cool and works in the same industry as I do. We got together for coffee a couple of weeks after meeting, and we've been texting ever since — maybe it's just *friendly, maybe it's a little bit flirty. I still* haven't told her I have a girlfriend, and it's starting to feel weird. On one hand, I don't want to assume she likes me "that way." On the other, I feel I'm being dishonest with her and especially with my girlfriend. Where do I go from here?—S.P.,

A: First, know that scenarios like this will come up on both sides. I highly encourage you to discuss it with your partner, because at the end of the day, having a second person to navigate the complexities of life with is the joy of being in a relationship! Why is it that in romantic connections we accept that we have to share the undersides of our humanity (poop horror stories, credit drama, morning breath and all), but when it comes to our natural drive to desire and be desired by others, we all want our partners to believe we're superhuman? Well, as it turns out, you're not made of steel — so don't be afraid to admit that to your girlfriend and ask for guidance on how to manage both the situation and your feelings. As for the other woman, you already know the answer to this: Yeah, you should bring it up, but I also think your senses are correct. Instead of making it a cautionary statement, look for a casual way to insert it into the conversation.

Q: I recently started dating a person who's transitioning and has bottom dysmorphia. They were born with female parts, and as a female I thought I would be able to better *figure out their body, but it's daunting right* now because they feel weird about their genitals, and I don't know how to navigate. How can I get to know my partner and their body in a way that will make us both feel comfortable?—J.M.,

A: Congrats to your partner for making such an important decision, and also congrats to the two of you on your new connection. I'm going to remind you of something I'm certain you already know: Change is not easy, and it absolutely is not instant! Your partner may have spent 20-plus years feeling uncomfortable in their body or getting messages about their genitals that never aligned with their feelings — and as powerful as the decision to take ownership over their truth through transitioning is, it does not magically erase all those damaging, dysmorphic years. If it took them two decades to make the decision to change, they're allowed to take at least a third of that time to heal from the

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The woman who has never had an orgasm or masturbated has likely not found her middle, because no one has ever invited her there.

dissonance they were surely feeling all that time. The good news is that though change isn't instant, if nurtured, it can be gradual. Through patience, positive affirmation and lots of communication, you should see an improvement in their attitude toward themselves, which will result in a better connection in the bedroom. Just remember that you should not expect a 180. Allow them to take the lead as much as possible. If you need a nudge, watch porn that turns both of you on and use it as a tool to discuss what you're comfortable and not comfortable exploring together.

Q: My girlfriend and I (a man) have been together for three years, and I love her immensely, but due to a lack of activity, our sex life is not that great. She works as an exotic dancer, and I think this affects her views on sexual intimacy. When I try to talk about it with her, she mainly tells me what I want to hear or avoids the question altogether. I would like to break down that barrier and get her to be more open. I know *this will be difficult because of the industry* she works in — and I have chosen to accept that aspect — so how can I help our sex life progress?—R.U.,

A: With this attitude you're already 80 percent there; all you have to do is figure out the other 20 percent together. I would imagine that, as an exotic dancer, your girlfriend might have some difficulty untangling her sexual practices at work from those at home. At work she probably has two modes: one in which she portrays someone else's sexual fantasy and another in which she shuts down her sexuality to recenter herself. It sounds as though this mirrors how she treats conversations around intimacy, either saying what she thinks you want to hear or not speaking at all. My guess is she would like space to call the shots, to allow things to be her idea and to know that there is no expectation for anything other than her truth. This transition may take time and a lot of verbal affirmations along the way. As a starting point, I would suggest you learn her "turn-on triggers" — a system I created to help couples understand, beyond basic biological instigators, what gets their partner in the mood. The triggers are environmental (the five senses must be appeased, meaning the environment must be tidy and set), mental (e.g., a sapiosexual who requires a mental connection before a physical one), desire (direct language or actions that make someone feel wanted), cat-and-mouse (power play in which a partner likes to work for it or be worked for), negotiated (something else in addition to sex must be offered to sweeten the pot) and visual (attention to appearance is paramount). I have a quiz you both can take to learn what each other's triggers are: thegameofdesire.com/quiz. Try it out as a launching point.

Q: What advice would you give a 20-something woman who has never had an orgasm because she can't rid herself of the idea that self-pleasure is bad or dirty? She doesn't know what she likes or even *how to figure it out, which makes telling* her partners what to do that much more *difficult.—R.W.*,

A: I have seen this question many, many times. What that person needs more than anything else right now is patience with herself as opposed to a quick "get over it and get into it" fix. Years and years of sex-negative messaging are not that easy to erase! I am a person who has drenched herself in sex-positive content, and I still, at times, feel internally shamed. Instead of trying to ignore those feelings when they come up, I embrace them. I examine where they're coming from, I ask myself how credible the original source is, and I make tiny adjustments to my behavior so that I can work through my feelings — slowly. The woman who has never had an orgasm or masturbated has likely not found her middle, because no one has ever invited her there. Her past told her to deny her sexual self, and perhaps those in her present are pushing her to be totally liberated in her sexual pursuits. That's a big jump. I would suggest she ignore both, find her own true starting point and take it from there. And because this can never be said enough, I'd like to add that while it can seem as though the rest of the world is living in the land of milk and orgasms, women's pleasure researcher Elisabeth Lloyd, author of The Case of the Female Orgasm, has found that only 25 percent of women are consistently orgasmic during vaginal intercourse and about five percent never have orgasms. The path to pleasure is not linear for many women — all the more reason to take it slow and do it your way.

Q: I'm in a monogamous relationship with the love of my life, but I've recently become attracted to someone else — a woman (like me) — whom I know well and have been interested in on and off since before this relationship. I've suggested polyamory, but my partner isn't onboard with that. What should I do?—G.S.,

A: It sounds like what you need is an opportunity to explore this connection with your "someone else" without impinging on your primary partnership. Interest and engagement are very different things. After spending more time with the other woman, the reasons the two of you never worked out may become clearer. On the flip side, maybe through this exploration you'll decide that she can actually improve all your relationships by allowing you to be in full, balanced expression. At that point I'd revisit the polyamory discussion with your partner. You may be looking for a free relationship — defined not by the rules or titles you chose in the beginning but by how each partner feels at any given time. The only thing constant in this world is change, and in a free relationship this isn't just your reality; it's your mantra. In order for this arrangement to thrive, you must be committed to hearing your partner's truths without constantly personalizing them. You acknowledge that your relationship is yours to experience, not to control. In short, when it comes to the rules of your relationship, you edit them often. And I suspect that right now what you need is a relationship that gives you space to flirt, connect and gain clarity.

Q: I want to get straight to the point: How do I get women to like me? I'm a 28-year-old black male who's never been in a serious relationship or had vaginal intercourse. (I once paid a stripper to let me go down on her, but that's it.) I've tried dating apps and shooting my shot on Twitter, but I still get nothing. Am I doing something wrong? Am I just ugly? Am I doomed to a life of watching porn all the time and paying strippers?—P.S.,

A: I am so grateful for this question. It is vulnerable, authentic and relatable. And you are already on track to solve your dilemma, so all I'm going to do is point that awesome energy toward some action. I have a five-phase strategy you can use to make yourself a masterful connector. Here's the lightning-round version:

1. Get to know yourself. This does not mean take yourself on a long romantic walk; it means start identifying the core of who you are and how you tend to interact with others. I suggest doing the Big Five Personality Test and an attachment-theory quiz to start. Invest some time in studying emotional intelligence to help you master your interpersonal life. Next, take what you've learned and get feedback from others; after all, the mirror cannot see itself. Since you don't have an ex, ask a close friend or family member how you can improve as a connector, and if you sense they're giving you answers to support your ego versus your growth, tell them you can handle the truth — and you need it in order to move forward.

2. Change yourself. Those are triggering words, I know, but change is the only constant; all you're doing is taking ownership over the process. Based on what you've learned through your self-assessment, start making small intentional changes so that who you know yourself to be and how people perceive you are more aligned.

3. Learn from the greats. Once you've gotten good with you, start reading books or enlisting the help of experts to learn how to attract others. We're told that flirting, seduction, social intelligence, charisma, empathy, humor, strength and even attractiveness are traits we're simply born with, but in truth these are all skills that can be taught.

4. Practice, practice, practice. There's a reason pro athletes practice more than they play: If you can't do something when the stakes are low, you won't have a chance in hell of performing when pressure, nerves and clocks are in the mix. So learn to love socializing, start conversations with no agendas and be charming to everyone you meet. Not only will this make you a better dater; it will make your time on this planet more pleasant.

5. Set yourself up for success. Now that you're good with you and good with others, put yourself in environments that welcome, want and warrant the absolute best version of you. ■

EMMY
Faye

Model @IAM_FRECKLEDFATALE

Photography by GARY BOND @GARYBONDPHOTO

From a small town to the big city, I enjoy the life in both places. The se renity and quite of the country side to the lights, shopping, music, restaurants and fun in the big city help keep me grounded in both.

Describe yourself in 3 words.
A sweet mischievous southern bell.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
I was excited yet nervous for this shoot.

What was it like starting out as a model?
Honestly, I had some very supportive models that helped me get started so I took rather quickly.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
The biggest challenge is finding great people to work alongside.

Describe your perfect day off when you're not modeling.
My perfect day off would be relaxing either at the spa or my bed.

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
I grew up in the country, so I love the quiet and listening to bird's chirp. Although, I do enjoy Whole Foods delivery to my flat.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
I would live inside the Palace of Versailles.

Do you have a secret talent?
Secret talents are numerous but y'all probably want to know I can tie a cherry stem in a knot with my tongue (Teehee).

A guilty pleasure?
Lots and lots of dark chocolate.

Describe to us your perfect date.
My perfect date is a warm summer night under the stars.

What is your favorite word in any language and what does it mean?
Redamancy: the act of loving the ones that love you, a love in full return. Peek at my tat.

What is your mantra?
Mantra: everything happens for a reason.

PORTRAITS *for the* PEOPLE

An eminent critic and a boundary-breaking artist convene for a rare tête-à-tête—and demonstrate that sometimes the most powerful insiders enter from the outside

INTERVIEW BY **SHIRA TARRANT**
ART BY **JR**

"Ready…one, two, three!"

It's 4:30 p.m. on a Thursday, and JR and Jerry Saltz are jumping. The French artist and the Pulitzer Prize–winning art critic bend their knees and bounce, striking a running-man pose mid-flight. Behind them is The Chronicles of New York City, a 32-foot-wide, 21-foot-tall black-and-white mural featuring 1,128 New Yorkers of every age and ilk, from movie stars to cops. JR spent a year photographing and interviewing each of them before digitally collaging their portraits into a single, sweeping New York cityscape.

Click-click-click-click. A camera flashes, and their landing thuds echo through the Brooklyn Museum's Great Hall.

"Exactly," JR nods approvingly.

"Wait—I have moobs!" exclaims Saltz, clutching his chest in mock distress. Laughter erupts from the smattering of people on Playboy's makeshift set.

Today marks the first time the two men have met, but they have much in common. In addition to being New Yorkers, both are self-taught outsiders — Saltz was a truck driver until the age of 41, and JR usually prefers open spaces to white walls — who have become powerful insiders by insisting that art is for everyone, not just the people who flock to museums and auctions.

We're here for a private preview of JR: Chronicles, the artist's first major museum show in North America and his largest exhibit to date. Now 36 years old, he is best known for wheat-pasting colossal blackand-white portraits onto buildings, bridges and the surfaces of geopolitical hot spots around the world. From favela matriarchs in Brazil to a toddler peering over a U.S.-Mexico border fence, his subjects are usually people whose portraits you wouldn't expect to see exhibited publicly, let alone at skyscraper scale.

The artist goes exclusively by his initials and usually dons shades and a fedora in public—an effort at semi-anonymity that ensures smooth passage across international borders. He also reasons that disclosing his identity would pull focus away from his subjects and the conversations their portraits can spark. (Saltz calls him an "inclusive version of Banksy.")

The year 2019 was a big one for JR. In addition to unveiling the largest show of his career, the self-described "wallpaper artist" photographed Madonna for the cover of The New York Times Magazine and, in an astounding feat of tromp l'oeil, submerged the Louvre's glass pyramid in a moat of paper and glue. JR: Chronicles, a 20,000-square-foot survey on view in Brooklyn until May 2020, spans 15 years of his career and marks the first time the museum has dedicated its Great Hall to a single artist. The aforementioned Chronicles of New York City, which includes an audio recording of each subject, is arguably JR's most ambitious project yet. (You can hear each interview via the QR code that appears below.) Part love letter to New York and part Diego Rivera mural for the digital age, the artist calls his creation "a mirror of the city."

However you characterize it, the piece brings to life one of the most resonant qualities of JR's work: a multilayered expression of democratized art.

The day after a star-studded reception, during which the artist spent more time catching up with a local butcher than he did side-hugging Jake Gyllenhaal, JR and Saltz stroll the museum, going deep on the work and their unlikely paths to the upper echelons of the art world. Read on for a sliver of that hour-plus conversation, which touches on teenage arrests, the notion of "radical vulnerability," grandmothers, Robert De Niro, the power of failure and much more. — Elizabeth Suman

Opening pages: The Chronicles of New York City, 2018–2019. **Left:** ROL.K, métro, Paris, France, 2002. JR started writing graffiti on walls at the age of 13; when he found a camera in the Paris Metro a few years later, he switched to covering them with portraits. **Opposite page:** JR au Louvre et le Secret de la Grande Pyramide, 2019. Last spring, in celebration of the Louvre Pyramid's 30th birthday, the artist, using 2,000 paper strips and 400 volunteers, made the structure appear to be rising from a quarry.

SALTZ: Last night there were thousands of people here, from every walk of life. I saw Chris Rock. I saw Jake Gyllenhaal. But then I saw hundreds of people I never see in a museum — street artists, neighborhood people — and they were taking pictures and pointing at each other. And here we are, surrounded by a gigantic mural of the people and places of New York City that you've arranged. What is going on here?

JR: Like you said, it's people. And actually, even if last night you saw some people who might be more famous than others — well, if they're in this mural, they're not bigger than anyone else. It's not a group photo; it's a group of photos, where no one person is more important than another. So Robert De Niro, who was there last night, he's sitting on a stoop with other people, just blending in. And every single person here decided to represent themselves the way they wanted. I didn't decide how they were going to be represented. They decided.

SALTZ: It's like a mural of modern life for future historians. There are spectacular Renaissance murals in Venice and Rome, where painters were painting huge crowd scenes like this. Do you think of these as gigantic frescoes of a time and a place? It's a living encyclopedia.

JR: Definitely. This is exactly the same thing, but the contemporary version of it, which is that you can listen to every single person and hear what they have to say. And those interviews are not conducted. It's not like "How do you define yourself?" It's "Here's a mike; you say whatever you want to say. One day your grandchildren will hear it. What would you want to say?"

SALTZ: As a viewer, I can read or hear those interviews. But first is the optical impact. It's almost beyond real — overwhelming, breathtaking, incomprehensible. It's almost inhuman, like an insect-eye view of the world. How was this made?

JR: Well, it's a collage, so actually it's in the line of work I've been doing, because I'm a wallpaper artist at the end.

SALTZ: What's a wallpaper artist? Is that bad?

JR: No! I unroll strips on walls. People think I'm a photographer. I'm not. Photography is just part of my process. I'm an artist who uses paper as my main subject, and I paste it.

SALTZ: There are lots of mini-narratives and dramas. It's like 10,000 soap operas. There's a group of B-boys and another of firefighters. There might be a painter or a sculptor working.

JR: Yes. People just reading, people hugging in the middle of the city. It's a mirror of the city. I've lived here for almost nine

Above: 28 Millimètres, Portrait of a Generation, Braquage, Ladj Ly by JR, Les Bosquets Montfermeil, 2004. JR's seminal work: a portrait of friend and filmmaker Ladj Ly wielding a video camera. The piece led to the series Portrait of a Generation, a response to the media's portrayal of young people from the projects. **Left:** 28 Millimètres, Face 2 Face, 2007. For this, perhaps the largest illegal photography exhibition on record, JR (and nuns) pasted portraits of Arabs and Jews, printed on 15,000 square feet of paper, in cities across Israel and Palestine.

years. Living here I had one vision of New York. But doing this mural is an excuse to go into every borough, into every neighborhood, and tap on anyone's shoulder and say, "Who are you?"

SALTZ: Let me ask a specific question. There are about 25 people in the center sucking on long, long straws. What the fuck is going on?

JR: Well, that was kind of a metaphor for all the people drinking juice all day and all the green juice in the city.

SALTZ: Right? It's insane. So that's a comment about how people are always trying to be healthy or they're busy. Are they sucking out our brains, mixing up the medicine?

JR: Yeah, it's this mixture.

SALTZ: Again, when I look at any one person, I can't really know if he's a movie star or an accountant or a gangster.

JR: Yes. But if you click on him, you'll have his name and his story — his story however he wishes to share it.

SALTZ: And then this makes me wonder.… You're anonymous. I know you only as JR. You're wearing sunglasses and a very stylish hat.

JR: Thank you. I appreciate that.

SALTZ: And incredibly good-looking. It's a nightmare for somebody like me. And you have charisma, so that helps you with other human beings. But why anonymity? You're a cult, but only as this unknown, masked mark-maker, like Zorro or Batman.

JR: This show actually helps me explain that. In a work like this, it's no use at all.

SALTZ: They see your face?

JR: Yeah, most of the people saw my eyes, when I was in my photo truck.

SALTZ: You have peered over your glasses at me and then taken off your hat. Am I being seduced? What's up?

JR: Whenever there's a camera, I tend to put on the glasses and hat. The thing is, when I take them off, you would not even recognize me at the airport or in the street. You're like, "I don't know this person. Who is that?" Anonymity helped me when I did work at the Mexico border. It was possible only because I could cross the border and they would not recognize me. I can go to Turkey and to the Middle East, and each time I have to pass police control or borders, I take my hat and glasses off, and I'm just ——

SALTZ: You're another person. Secret agents and assassins blend in too.

JR: Exactly.

SALTZ: But in the world of art and museums and galleries and your work, you're anonymous. Why?

JR: Well, because everything is connected. If a photo taken of us today is published without my hat and sunglasses, then when I'm at the border the next time, people will know my face. So I haven't done a photo since I was 13 years old that I don't have my sunglasses on.

SALTZ: Do you think if I knew that your name was "Jonathan Jones" and that you were from Holland that you would have trouble passing borders as a famous artist like this?

JR: Exactly. Look, when I did a project in Turkey, the city fined me. But they fined X, because they didn't have my name. I had to pay the fines through the company I rented the scaffolding from. They could never stop me when I left, but they would have if they knew my name was Jonathan Jones. Same with the border.

SALTZ: Genius. You could transport drugs, actually. In my world, the high artsy-fartsy art world, everybody has a name. It's stardom, the cult of the male star, in particular. You're that, but you're known only as JR. That's another layer of anonymity. Or is it another type of fame? Why that layer?

JR: Well, early on it started with graffiti.

SALTZ: What was your name?

JR: Face 3, but I would actually write "JR" a lot. Face 3 was really the early one.

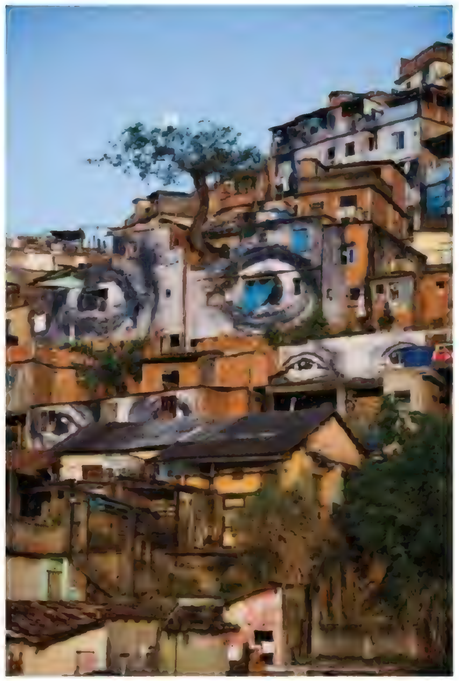
SALTZ: But that was just generic graffiti. I don't like the graffiti where they're just writing their names. The reason I don't like it is that no one breaks out of the graffiti convention. Everyone's work looks the same. Only the names are different.

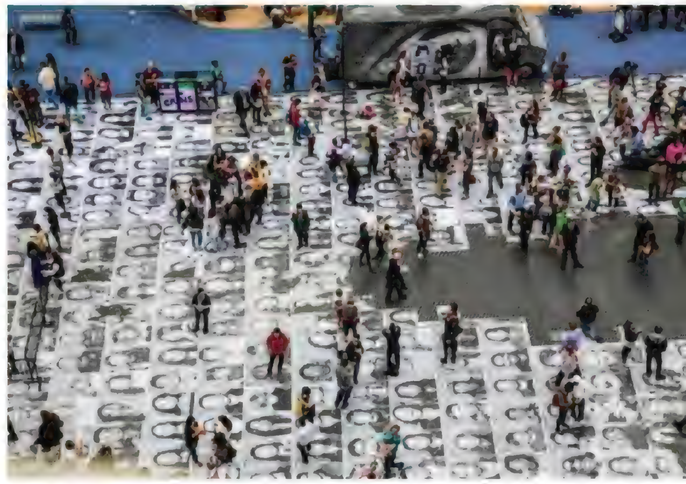
JR: Exactly.

SALTZ: Then — and I don't want you to be touchy about this — I think you took a thought structure that came through Banksy, where he's very antagonistic to politics and economics, and you made that go gigantic. You took an idea of graffiti, broke the earliest, boring convention of name writing, combined it with muralists — Diego Rivera,

For me, there's no taboo subject; it's about how deep you go.

The internet arrived exactly in my generation. So I didn't know Basquiat, Keith Haring.
SALTZ: You're an outsider, untrained.
JR: Completely.
SALTZ: And that's why you had to invent the entire process?
JR: To be honest, at 17, when I pasted the Champs-Élysées with my tiny photos [Expo 2 Rue], I thought I'd made it. I thought there was no other journey. My goal, as someone who grew up outside Paris, in the projects, was "I have to put my photos on the Champs-Élysées." And I did it!
SALTZ: People like me, creatures of the high-art world, weren't coming to your openings in the past five years. We've come only recently. What do you think of that?
JR: Well, for me it's getting more and more exciting, because, like last night, I can merge—my whole goal is to merge. Merge the worlds without high-class, low-class, famous, nonfamous. When people gather there, they realize they all have something in common. They've never met; now they're part of the same piece forever.
SALTZ: That seems like a big theme in your work. It isn't like Banksy, who says, "This is very bad." He's very pointed and harsh in his critiques of society, income inequality or whatever. You are without commentary, in a way.
JR: Who am I to comment?
SALTZ: Many of your pictures are just groupings of people. Why are they black and white?
JR: Black and white started because I wanted to differentiate myself from advertising, which I hold a big stand against. I haven't worked with any brand, any sponsor, any logo in 20 years — no Louis Vuitton, Colgate or whatever at the entrance of the museum.
SALTZ: So if I was Louis Vuitton and said, "I'd love you to make us a gigantic picture," you would say——
JR: And you bring me $20 million, I still say no.
SALTZ: You would say, "I will make it for $20 million but no insignia."
JR: Even then, I wouldn't even start a discussion.
SALTZ: How do you make money now?
JR: Most of my work doesn't make money. But one percent of it.…
SALTZ: Like a lot of artists.
JR: Yeah, 99 percent doesn't make money, but the one percent makes enough to publish the rest.
SALTZ: You self-financed to get here and become this artist you are now.
JR: Exactly. I self-finance, or sometimes there's a foundation or someone.
SALTZ: How did you self-finance 10 years ago?
JR: Even with my first project in the projects outside Paris, all my friends pooled some money. Each of them gave 50 bucks, 100 bucks. So I know I don't need to have a 100-person studio in the most impressive building to be functioning. I know I can function with nothing, because I did it.
SALTZ: You have a real affinity for women, powerful women. What do you think accounts for that? I don't want to ruin your anonymity, but does this connect to your mother?
JR: Yeah. I grew up living with my grandmother but also taking care of elderly women in my building, in the projects.
SALTZ: Would I have heard of the place you grew up?
JR: It's a project a bit like the one where I took most of my photos, but another one.
SALTZ: Okay. So you were middle-class, roughly.
JR: Yeah, low middle-class.
as you've talked about. And then the paper; I think the paper is key for you.
JR: Yeah. Look, I wish I could say it in those words. It's probably right. The thing is you have to go back to when I was 17. I knew nothing about Banksy or about Shepard Fairey.
SALTZ: Can you say what year it was?
JR: It was exactly 2000.
SALTZ: And was Banksy a god? No. He was just an English guy.
JR: Exactly. Doing graffiti too, actually.
SALTZ: I heard a rumor he went to an expensive art school.
JR: I have never been to art school.
SALTZ: Me neither. No art in my life.
JR: That's why I love talking with you.
SALTZ: Art was for smart people.
JR: I think that's why I came so naturally into the art world: because I didn't even know there was an art world.
SALTZ: I have no degrees. I was a long-distance truck driver until the age of 41.
JR: I love that.
SALTZ: You started at 13?
JR: Yes. I'm 36 now. When I was 13, I started writing my name on the wall. When I was 16, a friend of mine came to me and said, "JR, I've got to stop graffiti because I think what we're doing here is we're a victim of a society of consumers. We're writing our name every day like all those brands around us." I was like, "Are you crazy?" Then it hit me, and I'm like, "You know what? I'm actually really bad at it anyway. I don't even know how to make a colorful painting. It's all the same." Luckily for me I found a camera, but photography was a rich sport. Photography was not accessible to everybody, and that's where I think if I was born 10 years earlier, there would be none of what I've done.
SALTZ: Because then you would've had to pay for film and developing——
JR: And travel. Low-cost travel arrived exactly in my generation.





Top: The Ballerina Jumping in Containers, France, 2014. Considering his penchant for jumping, JR's affinity for dance is unsurprising; in 2014, he choreographed a production for the New York City Ballet. **Above:** Inside Out, Times Square, 2013. In 2011, JR became the first artist to win a TED Prize. He put the purse toward the launch of this ongoing interactive project, which allows anyone anywhere to organize portrait-pastings. **Left:** 28 Millimètres, Women Are Heroes, Action in the Favela Morro da Providência, 2008. A scene from Women Are Heroes, a 2008–2014 project that focuses on portraits of women living in areas of conflict.

Above: The Gun Chronicles: A Story of America, 2018, video mural. For this Emmy-nominated video project, a still of which appeared on the cover of Time magazine, JR managed to get members of the NRA and Black Lives Matter not only in the same photograph but eventually in the same room. The artist has installed Chronicles murals in San Francisco and Clichy, France, and began work on one in Cuba in December.

Above: A portrait from Wrinkles of the City, Los Angeles, 2011. In 2008, JR launched this ongoing project that examines age. For this installment, JR pasted portraits of people across L.A. as a rumination on the city's focus on superficial beauty. **Right:** Migrants, Mayra. Picnic Across the Border, 2017. In the U.S., JR is best known for his 2017 viral project Kikito, a giant photograph of a Mexican toddler installed atop a California border fence. He marked the final day of the project by staging a transborder celebration featuring "the eyes of a dreamer."

SALTZ: So you have a mother. Did she approve of the JR entity when he would run around? Were you on drugs in those days?
JR: I never drank or took drugs, but I was into groups of friends fighting.
SALTZ: Did you fight?
JR: Yes, and I had a lot of trouble with the police at that age.
SALTZ: Did you carry a gun?
JR: No, but my friend did. Or knives. And I have to say, at that time my parents were really worried. One day, I remember the police called them, and they had to come pick me up in Paris because I was arrested for graffiti. My mom was like, "What did he do?" They said, "Well, he tagged on the wall." And she was like, "Oh, and you want me to come all the way to Paris because he tagged on the wall? Well, you can keep him." Boom. And so that day I was like, "Okay, I'll find myself a passion." Then I have a goal: My goal is to make that roof, however I get there. It's to go into that tunnel, however I do it. And then slowly I started changing from the groups of friends who were just making trouble to the groups of friends who were looking to climb the highest building or TV antenna.
SALTZ: I think your work is changing right now. I think something's going on. I know something needs to change so you're not just this fancy-pants big photo-mural guy with a hat and sunglasses.
JR: Well, I hope to constantly be changing.
SALTZ: You need to be changing, because otherwise, like most graffiti artists — and you're not that — they get one style and that's it. That isn't a good thing, JR. Are you boxing yourself in, becoming just another visual brand?
JR: But that's why I directed a ballet. I made a film with Agnès Varda. That's why I'm always pushing myself in areas I don't know anything about, always.
SALTZ: Right.
JR: Because I want to fail. I think there's nothing better than trying a project where there's more failure than success. I put myself in this constantly, and I think that if not, there's no point to being an artist if you're doing everything the same that people like because it works.
SALTZ: That's just product.
JR: Yeah, exactly. So I didn't choose that journey to just repeat myself.
SALTZ: Samuel Beckett said, "Try again, fail again, fail better."
JR: Exactly.
SALTZ: Well, wow, JR. This is an amazing journey you've taken. I feel lucky in a way — you don't normally do press like this. What made you say yes to playboy? You're not being paid; there's no dough here. And it's, um, playboy.
JR: You know, one thing I realized a couple of years ago when I stopped doing press is that I had so much more time. I didn't have to wake up at seven a.m. to go to a radio station. I also realized that often you don't have the space to talk. If we were talking for 10 minutes, however great you are in 10 minutes, it doesn't get to the depths of the work. So it's better that people don't know about it. When I put my work on the street, it's not even signed. It's only the people who want to find out what it is who will find out. If not, they walk every day in front of a black-and-white image not knowing what it is. So the reason I said yes to this interview is really because we would have space, and also when I heard I could meet you and we could have this conversation.
SALTZ: That's why I said yes, because I never interview artists. Ever. I always think I don't want them to tell me what they think; I want to say what I think. You made your work, now I want to tell you what I see. And in your latest work especially, I see real art.
JR: Thank you. I could speak for hours like this, because for me, there's no taboo subject; it's about how deep you go.
SALTZ: No taboo. Radical vulnerability. Time to push the outer boundaries of what you can do now.
JR: Exactly. ■

AVIANNAH ÉLISE

Model **@AVIANNAHELISE**

Photography by **JESTON BRANDON @PREFECTLYFLAWLESSPHOTO**
MUA **ANDREW CARTER @ANDREWCARTERBEAUTY**
PR/Agency **LEO ALDERMAN @LEOALDERMAN @LSAMODELS @LSAPUBLICATIONS**
Stylist **CHRISTINA MENDICINO @BODYARTBYCHRISTINA**
Cars **G. M. LUXE**

Tell us something surprising about you?
I have a double-jointed hip. Only one though. It's definitely an inconvenience but some poses are easier than others since I can really just throw my hip out.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Very much so, this is the second time and I was just as nervous and excited as the first. I don't think that feeling will ever wear off.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Working with my tattoos and finding companies that don't view it as "taboo" It's 2020. I think the stigma of it needs to be done with.

How much did you enjoy the body art and super cars in your photoshoot?
We had a complete blast the Body Art by Christina was done so beautifully. I felt so sexy! The luxury SUV that G.M. Luxe brought over for us just made the shoot go over the top. I wanted to bring the best images to PLAYBOY Africa!

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
I am 100% a city girl. I need everything around me as close as possible. I've lived in the country before and the drive just to get to certain places is too much. It's amazing to disconnect but that is what shoot-cations are for!

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
I would love to live in Spain. I see pictures all the time and I just love everything. Italy would be another place, because of the pizza!

Name three things on your bucket list?
Travel the world and see every country, Even though that's more than three right there. Go to a Super Bowl game and Fly an airplane. Definitely not jump out of one LOL!

A guilty pleasure?
Ice cream 100%, Do not tell my trainer but I love to finish off my daily Marcos with ice cream. I feel like it's always the way to my heart.

Do you prefer kissing or cuddling?
Honestly, I would have to say both. I always desire that level of intimacy with my partner so I definitely want to be in his arms and kissing.

Describe to us your perfect date?
Just an everyday trip to the beach, play some football, get some sun, dip into the water. Nothing could be better.

A guy could win his way to your heart by... buying me Fuzzy Tacos. I'm a complete sucker for their chicken soft tacos. The garlic sauce, all of it. Maybe, a BD10 Aston Martin also.

Five words that best describe you are?
Trustful, Loyal, Bubbly, Never-ending & Tasteful. I could go on and on; but I would say that is the most accurate.

sterling for all

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **AARON FEAVER**

The trajectory of Sterling K. Brown has us on the edge of our seat, which is right where he wants us

BY **ANITA LITTLE**

The first time I meet Sterling K. Brown the smoke is literally clearing around him. Yes, a crew member has just turned off a hazer as production pauses for Brown to swap into another look, but the metaphor is undeniable. The actor, despite almost two decades of well-regarded work on television, has only recently become a household name, thanks to his Emmy-winning performance across four seasons of NBC's This Is Us. Unlike Randall Pearson — the straitlaced, civically engaged and mathematician-smart patriarch he plays on the show —Brown has natural swag and commands the room with a rich, resonant voice trained at Stanford and in regional theater nationwide. Decked out in a visual tribute to casual cool — rolled- up trousers, a gold medallion and a half-buttoned graphic-print shirt — he asks, "Can we get some more Drizzy?" He shifts from posing to dancing as Drake's "Controlla" fills the studio.

When I ask Brown how success and pop-culture notoriety have changed him, he responds quickly.

"I'm a total dick now," he tells me. "I have narrowed my peripheral vision."

Some might say this means he's more goal-oriented. Others might add that it feels like a moment of profound clarity.

In 2018 Brown launched Indian Meadows Productions, which gave him the power not just to change the narrative but to create it. The production company's namesake is the St. Louis neighborhood where Brown grew up. His mom still owns a house there, and his brothers and sisters are among the city's residents. The mission of Indian Meadows Productions is to champion racial inclusion in Hollywood, both in front of the cameras and behind them. Brown has already closed a deal with Hulu for his company to produce an adaptation of Esi Edugyan's bestselling book Washington Black.

"I wanted to have some sort of control over what stories could be put out to the world and take advantage of an opportunity to be one of the storytellers," Brown says. "If you don't have enough bells and whistles in terms of the right writers, the right showrunners, the right directors, the best piece of material can fall on deaf ears."

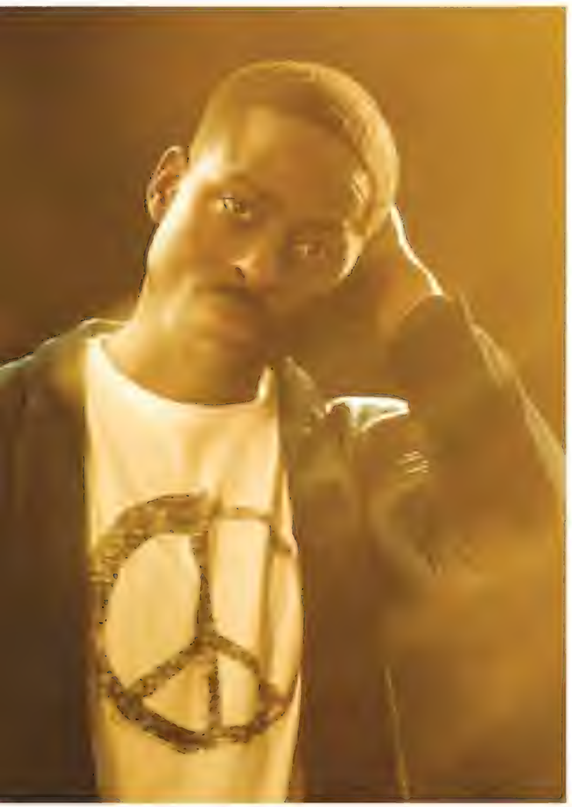
By owning the means of production, so to speak, Brown will also be able to reshape one of the most formidable barriers for black-led media: marketing. Oftentimes, films and TV programs featuring predominantly black casts are promoted only to black audiences, which can drastically reduce a project's impact. (The packaging of works by Tyler Perry, who made history in October as the first black person to independently own a studio lot, comes to mind.) Recent films such as Jordan Peele's Us and Ryan Coogler's Black Panther — in which Brown plays father to Michael B. Jordan's Killmonger — have benefited from crossover appeal, both critically and at the box office, but they remain the exception. Nevertheless, the tide is shifting. The 2019 study "Inclusion in the Director's Chair," by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, features an "intersectional analysis" of 1,335 directors attached to top-grossing films between 2007 and 2018. The study determined that "16 of the directors of the top 100 movies [in 2018] were black — this historically high figure is nearly three times greater than the six black directors working in 2017 and twice as many as the eight black directors working in 2007."

Says Brown,"If you have a black movie, we need to stop selling it as if it's only for a black audience. A movie about black people can appeal to anyone. All human stories have a universal appeal when told well." One practice he has come up against in Hollywood is the casting of leading men of color opposite non-black actresses in an attempt to end-run the marketing of a film as a "black movie." Saying he "frowns upon" black actors who have typically worked opposite white or Latina leading ladies, Brown is careful when choosing projects.

"Will Smith has the strength to pair himself with whomever he wants and sell that movie globally," he says. "He can provide an opportunity to a sister to shine in a way they may not be able to if it weren't a Will Smith movie."

When projects with black casts reach

A movie about black people can appeal to anyone. All human stories have a universal appeal when told well."



a broader audience, that of course results in more big breaks for black actors, directors and writers. Brown's success is proof: His command on the mainstream This Is Us and the Ryan Murphy–produced American Crime Story, both of which feature relatively diverse casts, led to a lot of televised acceptance speeches. In addition to his two Emmy wins, he is the first African American to win a Golden Globe for best actor on a television drama and the first African American male actor to win a Screen Actors Guild Award for a drama series. Outside of This Is Us and Indian Meadows, Brown added A24's November release Waves to his film résumé, nabbed a part in Disney's colossal Frozen sequel and will appear on the next season of Amazon Prime's flagship comedy The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.

I ask Brown if, as a leader in an industry that suffers from a scarcity of opportunities for actors of color, he feels pressure to embody the punishing standard of #BlackExcellence. He tents his fingers, leans back and ventures a joke. "We got to keep it together, because they got Mekhi Phifer or Omar Epps on call, waiting to come in and replace your boy," he says. "You spend so long feeling replaceable that it's hard to shake that feeling."

His television fame is concurrent with something else, something he's learned to be unabashed about but never expected: his emergence as a sex symbol. Randall Pearson wasn't scripted to be sexy, but thirst isn't predictable. On Google "Sterling K. Brown shirtless" returns more than 1 million results. Some of the most over-the-top headlines include sterling k. brown's sexy abs shatter instagram and give the people sterling k. brown's booty!

"Sneaky fit" is the term Brown uses to describe his physique. "I'm not popping out of my clothes per se, but if I ever take my shirt off, you'd be like, Oh snap, I didn't see that one coming." He quickly adds, "I don't think I've ever gotten a job because of the way I was built. People have seen me as being a good actor, and they hire me for things in which they need a good actor."

The hypersexuality assigned to black men has some grisly historical underpinnings that are glazed over in horny internet chatter —"It's a slippery slope, and it's one that is dangerous," he says — but Brown recognizes that "it's nice to have your sexuality celebrated, as long as you're being celebrated in total, as a whole human being and not fetishized as one particular thing."

In other words, "sex symbol" is not a terrible title when it's your least impressive achievement. After years of laying the groundwork, Brown seems to have found the freedom to transcend being one thing and to embrace many personas: the total dick, the leading man, the producer, the trailblazer, even the sex symbol. No wonder audiences are mesmerized. ■

VICTORIA LACE

@VICTORIA_LACE

CAMERON DOANE @CAMERONDPHOTO

Victoria Lace is a model, entrepreneur, and hair-stylist. Born May 17th, grew up in a small town outside of New Orleans, she is currently living in Dallas.

Describe yourself in three words.
Ambitious, visionary, dependable

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
This can't be a serious question? Umm ABSO-freaking-LUTELY, of course! I still can't believe it's happening .... like some one pinch me.

What was it like starting out as a model?
It all just kinda happened unexpectedly, I was doing a friends hair for a photoshoot the Photographer asked me to stand in to test the lighting while she was changing. He then said "these are really good, so you have any outfits to shoot in" my friend let me borrow some of hers. When the photographer posted the edits on my FB wall someone seen it and it lead to my first calendar cover, it all kinda started from there. I'm forever grateful for the things I've been able to do and places I've been able to see since falling into this industry.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Learning that no is not always a no, some times it's just a not right now. There's no such thing a failure if you keep trying it's just a set back that makes accomplishments more rewarding.

Describe your perfect day off when you are not modelling?
This is a hard one because it changes so often Sometimes I'm so busy that there's nothing better than cuddling with my dogs and my man watching movies being lazy all day!

Sometimes it's watching the sunrise with a couple of coffee and good conversation and then there's times where it's drinking my body weight in margaritas with my friends on a beach! I'm really unpredictable you never know what you're gonna get.

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
I grew up in the country it was so much fun, I road four wheelers, went fishing had fun bonfire parties... I definitely wouldn't change that. Now You I'm such a city girl, it's so nice to have everything be convenient and always something going on, being surrounded by so many people. But give these southern roots some cowboy boots and a good country concert and I'm in heaven!

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
Anywhere beach front.

Do you have a secret talent?
If I told you it wouldn't be a secret, guess we can leave that to your imagination.

A guilty pleasure?
Online shopping

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
Don't blink by Kenny Chesney
It makes me think of how precious time is.

What is your favorite word in any language and what does it mean?
Fate .... everything happens for a reason

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
You're never too old to start something new or chase a dream! Remember other's opinions don't define you. Live life treating others how you want to be treated, always stay humble and kind!

I appreciate this opportunity and being able to live out my dream! I appreciate all the love and support along the way!

UŽUPIS UTOPIA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MAX LOEFFLER**

What's the true story behind a make-believe republic in Eastern Europe that captures the imagination of everyone who visits? **Daisy Alioto** searches for meaning in a booming micronation

Before traveling to Užupis, a self-declared republic within the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, I read the 2009 novel The *Republic of Užupis*, by Korean author Haïlji. The protagonist, Hal, hopes to return to Užupis to lay to rest his father's ashes. Upon arriving, he encounters confusion about the republic's location, first with customs agents at the airport and then with his taxi driver, who circles Vilnius for more than an hour searching for the neighborhood. This is pure magical realism, but the allegory makes its point: Užupis, a micronation founded in 1998, is elusive to outsiders but meaningful to those who want to believe.

Arriving via Stockholm, I begin my journey differently than Hal. I bypass customs at Vilnius Airport and head straight into a cab. The driver easily pulls up my Užupian Airbnb on GPS. We wind through the narrow turns of Vilnius's Old Town, and Billie Eilish's familiar vocal fry on "Bad Guy" growls from the speakers as we cross the Bridge of Užupis. *Užupis* means "beyond the river," and the republic's parliament is housed in a watering hole that overlooks the moat-like border. In an alcove in the stone embankment sits a bronze mermaid statue that's famous among locals; it was created by Romas Vilčiauskas, an unremarkable sculptor by Google standards. Legend has it that if you look into the mermaid's eyes too long, you'll never leave.

Visiting a new city just as the leaves start to turn is one of travel's many charms. Visiting a micronation on the precipice of autumn belongs in a separate category. Here, the air

My intention was to pack all the world into one little place."

shivers with the past and a promise for the future of humanity. The Užupian constitution, 41 articles in length, is posted on mirrored plaques for public consumption and is considered required reading for tourists. Rūta Ostrovskaja, the republic's Ambassador in Vigor and Decision Making, calls the document "one of the best human rights declarations in the world." Articles range from "Everyone has the right to love" to "Everyone has the right to cry." Some border on the absurd. ("A cat is not obliged to love its owner but must help in time of nee[d].") Notably, in December 2018, the version of the constitution at the Embassy of the Republic of Užupis to Munich — the document has been translated into dozens of languages — became the first ever to recognize artificial intelligence: "Any artificial intelligence has the right to believe in a good will of humanity." (Said embassy consists of a small collective of artists and techies based in the Bavarian capital.) According to Ostrovskaja, the constitution wasn't written to be zany. It was written in the interest of survival.

Užupis was founded on April Fools' Day 1998 and has since captured the attention of artists, poets and the technologically forward alike. It raises questions about the dwindling possibilities for borderless states in a post-digital world and the potential for creative autonomy and self-governance amid rampant globalism. Comprising 148 acres and cordoned off from the rest of the capital by the Vilnia River, it has roughly 7,000 inhabitants. MicroFreedom, a website that indexes the world's micronations, ranks Užupis as "distinguished" for its longevity and success. It has been likened to Christiania, Copenhagen's hippie commune, minus the open-air cannabis market. Munich's ambassador to Užupis, Max Haarich, has even suggested that it's the most stable republic in Europe. Yet the ephemeral nature of a micronation invites projection and change: Depending on whom you ask, Užupis is either a revolutionary political project or a fairy tale; it's a figment of the Baltic imagination or another rapidly gentrifying former Bohemia. In truth, Užupis is all these things.

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The Office of the Geographer and Global Issues, a division of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research within the U.S. State Department, owns a collection of letters that have been referred to internally as the Ephemeral States file. The collection paints the micronation movement as a study in contrasts. One letter is from Leicester Hemingway, brother of Ernest, and comes with an endorsement from an employee of the Inspector General's Office that reads, in part, "She knows Mr. Hemingway quite well and says he is not a kook and that he is quite serious about this cause." The endorsement pertains to Hemingway's 1973 request that the United States recognize an artificially created island near the Bahamas. The request was denied. Another letter, from an indigenous leader, sought permission to establish the Maori Kingdom of Tetiti Islands in the South Pacific. Nothing came of it.

Most of the file's contents are comical and a testament to the male desire to conquer even a thimble's worth of territory. But some letters, such as the one from the Maori Kingdom, are harder to dismiss. In a region littered with colonial holdovers, who's to say who owns what?

The internet has no doubt accelerated interest in micronations. It has also divorced the movement from physical territories, though the existence of areas such as Užupis, which the Dalai Lama visited in June 2001, continues to lend credence to land projects. Travis McHenry, who manages MicroFreedom, tells me that the late-1990s rise of GeoCities, which stored usercreated web pages, was instrumental in bringing awareness to individual micronations and the movement as a whole. In 2001, he used GeoCities to build a web presence for his own micronation, Westarctica, which corresponds to 620,000 square miles of unclaimed territory in Antarctica. McHenry, who was in the Navy at the time, staked his claim online for fun. He says the project backfired when two men from the Pentagon came to interrogate him and threatened to revoke his security clearance. Tensions were high in 2001, so McHenry recused himself from his "throne" until his military service ended. He has since transitioned Westarctica into an environmental nonprofit that advocates for the preservation of the region.

The Seasteading Institute, founded by libertarians in 2008, sits on a similar axis of good intentions and make-believe. Its mission is to build autonomous floating cities to counter global ills such as rising sea levels, overpopulation and poor governance, but tax evasion would no doubt be a primary draw for the wealthy wishing to establish residence on a seafaring city. The institute's ambassador program represents 29 countries and 24 U.S. states, as well as Washington, D.C. Venture capitalist Peter Thiel has already invested in the project.

Elsewhere are subreddits, Facebook groups and at least one Discord chat devoted to the micronation movement and populated by younger generations. Of the increasing interest among young people in establishing their own sovereignty, McHenry points out that it solves two perennial gripes of adolescence: a "lack of control and having no friends." It's also a creative exercise, offering opportunities to design currency, flags and stamps. Some of these useless stamps, termed Cinderellas, become collectors' items, according to MicroFreedom founder Steven Scharff. "Not because of the fantasy element," he says. "The running joke is that the issuing party is gone at midnight."

• • •

On my first night in Užupis, I manage to avert my eyes from the mermaid and instead focus on the Bridge of Užupis as I wait in parliament for the foreign minister, Tomas Čepaitis. I watch a man wade into the river to fasten a wooden swing to the wrought iron railing, a cigarette dangling from his mouth. Known as Destiny's Swing, the attraction is a permanent fixture; the laborer is replacing its broken predecessor. Above the swing are doily-like dream catchers made by local grandmothers. "They're going to dissolve in the winter, like our memories of our women," Ostrovskaja later tells me.

Čepaitis and Romas Lileikis, Užupis's president, founded the republic and wrote its constitution in an attempt to reshape the area's history. Before World War II, Užupis was a Jewish neighborhood, but about 95 percent of Lithuania's Jewish population was killed in the Holocaust. The emptied area deteriorated and criminals terrorized anyone unfortunate enough to walk the neighborhood after sunset. The area's main thoroughfare soon earned the nickname "the Street of Death."

Čepaitis was familiar with the works of midcentury Polish writer and futurist Stanisław Lem, who predicted such technologies as virtual reality and search engines. Now that those innovations are no longer science fiction, Čepaitis is less interested in them. Amid the technological developments of the past two decades, Čepaitis tells me, "the soul remained the same — or became more savage." He adds, "You cannot live in a fairy tale all the time; you cannot live in reality all the time. My intention was to pack all the world into one little place."

Declaring independence has been a test, in some form, of Lithuania's post-Soviet government. Would the area tolerate a new doctrine? The material conditions of Užupis have certainly improved since 1998 — almost too much. For more than two decades the area has prospered under the utopian constitution. In 2004, geographers Harald Standl and Dovilė Krupickaitė published a study of gentrification in Vilnius with a special focus on Užupis. They found that between 1998 and 2003, real estate prices in the area rose by more than 70 percent. They also found that 65 percent of the heads of "new households" in Užupis had a university degree, versus 12 percent of "old households."

Užupis is now one of the most expensive places to live in Vilnius. Electric scooters zip by a sculpture of an angel in the republic's central square. Herr Katt, a hip barbershop, and Kitsch, a gallery-café, cater to a new generation. Kitsch accepts Bitcoin. It also serves an Užburger on a blue bun in homage to the republic's flag, which features a hand encircled in blue. Čepaitis tells me these changes are not unwelcome as long as the atmosphere is preserved, but he also claims that historic wooden buildings have conveniently gone up in flames to make way for development. In this way, Užupis is no different from every gentrifying community in the 21st century.

In 2013, Gleb Divov, a Moscow native, was planning a move to Barcelona. He was set to open a company there and had even learned Spanish. On a whim, he booked a three-day trip to Vilnius and ventured into Užupis on the last. "When I walked across the bridge, it just clicked: Okay, I'm home," he says. Divov subsequently moved to the area, where he founded a start-up, Musical Blockchain, that aims to bring residents together with compositions created by artificial intelligence.

Divov is a synesthete: He can hear a melody just by looking at an object. His AI composer uses more than 40 data points — from color to shape to environmental conditions — along with a coded knowledge of music to turn areas of Vilnius into a symphony. "We define musical composition as a chain of linked blocks," he explains. Now Užupis's Minister of Sound, Events and Technologies, Divov dreams of implementing this tool as a means of canceling out noise pollution and drawing attention and new visitors to underdeveloped parts of the city.

The city wasn't always tourist-friendly, according to William Adan Pahl, a Detroit native who has lived in Lithuania since the year of Užupis's founding. But Užupis, by welcoming newcomers with open arms, benefited from a wave of tourism that flooded Eastern Europe following the Pan-European expansion of Ryanair airlines and Lithuania's new popularity as a destination for bachelor parties. ("The cities of Eastern Europe may come to curse the day they ever got that Ryanair route," reported The Independent in 2016. "Yes, invading hordes of drunken Brits is good for the local economy, but at what greater cost?")

"It was like something was coming from off in the distance and we were going to be ready for that change when it came," Pahl says. He stops short of calling the government a drinking club and considers the constitution a symbol rather than a living political document. "From my point of view, we're celebrating the instrument of the constitution. It's the focus of a celebration. It's not a tool. It reflects the spirit of the place," Pahl says.

Haarich, the Munich ambassador, wants to use Užupis as a model for bringing together techie and art communities. He worked in artificial intelligence at a start-up center partnered with BMW, among other companies, that has plans to expand into one of Munich's artist communities. "Artists can make technology more ethical just by bringing it closer to society and making it more accessible," he says. "There's this big threat of gentrification — but there's this big chance to create something very innovative that I want to connect to Užupis because it has 22 years of experience with gentrification."

Haarich is part of a Facebook group dedicated to micronations. It's filled with people hoping to found their own Užupis. Few of these communities will survive — but if they do, technology will likely play a role. McHenry says, "They really are an inspiration to every other micronation out there and to common people who have no idea what a micronation is."

• • •

As if to underscore the fascination with Užupis's origins, a Korean production company is filming a re-creation of the annual April 1 celebration of independence during my visit. On that date every year, tourists can get their passports stamped on the bridge, and government ministers are paid for their service in rare Užupian currency. At this mock celebration, a band plays "When the Saints Go Marching In" as actors on stilts walk alongside cars flying the republic's flag. I approach two locals cast as extras who, like me, are watching the action.

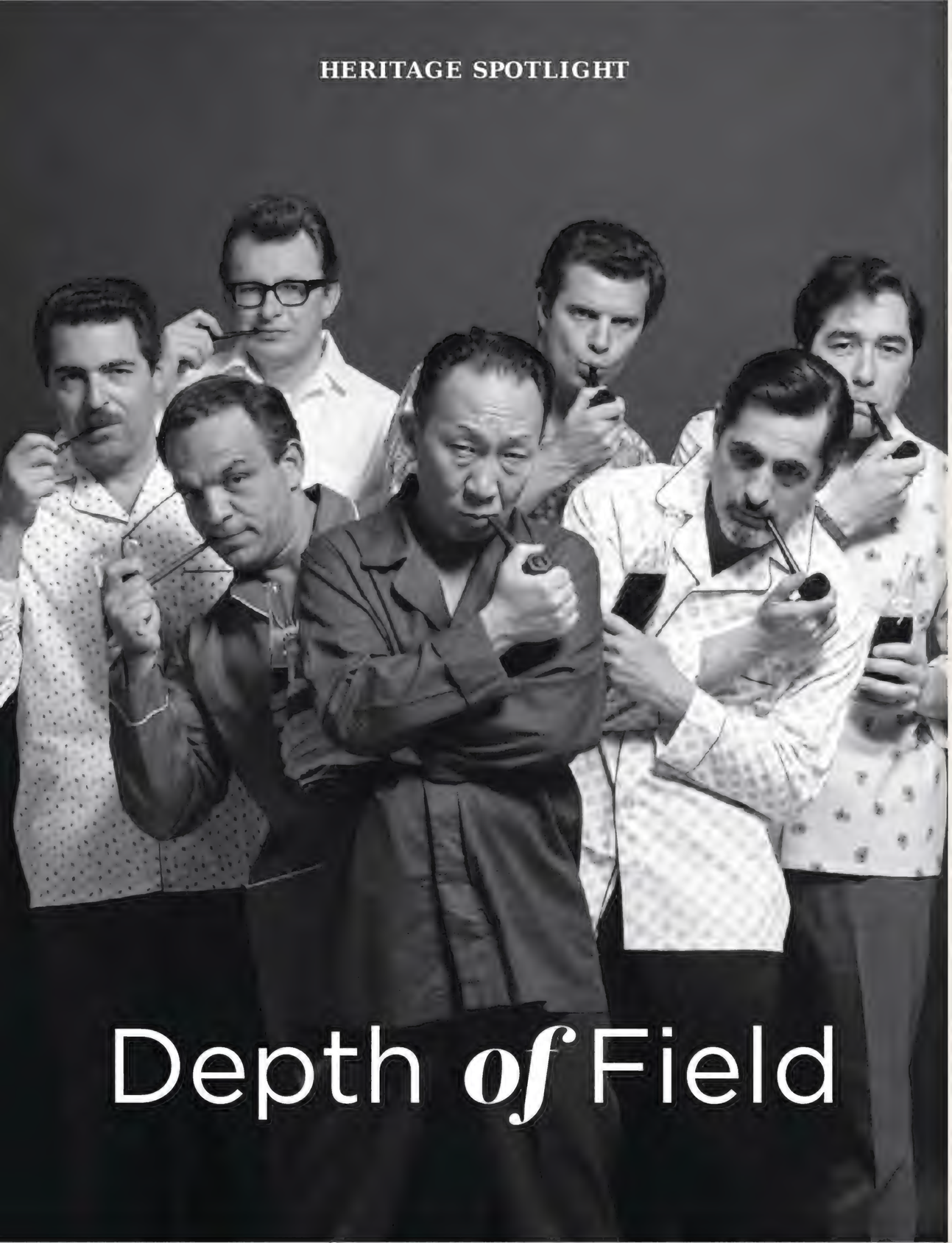
"I've never seen a Lithuanian dressed like this," says a girl costumed in Victorian fashion. Her companion is wearing a parrot suit.

"Is the parrot customary?" I ask.

"No." We both laugh.

On my last day I revisit the constitution plaques and wait for other tourists to leave before setting my palm on the Open Hand of Užupis, which is mounted nearby. Tourists lay their hands on this symbol for good luck. It shares its design with the official flag: a hand with a hole through the middle. Some sources cite it as a symbol of refusing bribes, but Ostrovskaja tells me it means "easy come, easy go"—as in, one can't hold on to material things. I touch it and feel an invisible country slip through my fingers.

In his book Invisible Cities, the Italian journalist and author Italo Calvino writes, "The catalogue of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to be born. When the forms exhaust their variety and come apart, the end of cities begins." Before I leave, Čepaitis gives me a book of poetry by a Finnish ambassador. When I open it back home in New York City, a stamp falls out. Its provenance: the Federal Republic of Lostisland. ■



Depth *of* Field

We train our lens on the magazine's founding photo editor for some long overdue exposure

BY **CAT AUER**

Few jobs are as ready-made to inspire envy among lovers of women than that of PLAYBOY photo director. Yet little has been written about the magazine's founding "picture editor," Vincent T. Tajiri, who for 15 stratospheric years oversaw our photo department. During his tenure Tajiri watched the print run top 7 million, thanks in large part to the teeming photographer and stringer ecosystem he developed. Praised as a gentleman and a deep thinker by his former employees (and called a cocksucker by Hunter S. Thompson; more on that later), he remained an elusive figure among the many outsize personalities of playboy's early years. So who was Vince Tajiri?

• • •

Born in southern California in 1919, Tajiri was a teenager when his older brother Larry, who went on to be a distinguished journalist, brought home a 35-mm SLR camera from a reporting trip to Asia. Vince, who'd been priming himself to be a writer, fell in love with the medium. "I knew very little about photography then," he told Popular Photography in 1968, "but I shot promiscuously and uninhibitedly." At the same time he was developing his photography skills, he wrote prolifically for English-language papers that served the Japanese American community.

At the age of 18 he moved to San Francisco to work for one such daily, Nichibei Shinbun. The previous year he had created Rigmarole, an intermittent Nichibei column that variously covered the nisei (Americans who, like Tajiri, were born to immigrant parents from Japan), sports stats, movies and any other topic that caught Tajiri's attention.

In February 1941 Tajiri was drafted into the Army. He was at Camp Bonneville in Washington state on December 7 of that year when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The next day the United States entered World War II, and less than three months later the government ordered nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast — the vast majority of them U.S.-born citizens — out of their homes and into incarceration camps. Among them were Tajiri's mother and younger siblings, who were sent to the camp in Poston, Arizona with only what they could carry. They lost everything else, including the home they owned in San Diego.

Tajiri was a sergeant in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team — the famed unit composed of nisei soldiers that became the military's most decorated — when he married his girlfriend, Rose Hayashi, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in August 1943, ahead of his expected deployment. Poor health ultimately kept Tajiri out of overseas duty. Three of his brothers volunteered to serve. One, who joined the Army out of Poston in 1943, was later awarded a Purple Heart.

The inequity between the Tajiris' service and the government's bigotry is almost too obvious to state, but Vince gave it eloquent expression in a September 1942 letter to the Fresno Bee: "Except for minor differences in pigment we are just like you." Not only did the Army have Japanese American officers, he reminded readers, but "another 16,000 are serving in the ranks.... America's battle is our battle, and America's enemies are our enemies."

• • •

After the war, Vince and Rose moved to Chicago, where they started a family. Vince took on freelance photo assignments and soon enough was working concurrently as editorial director of three photo-based titles: Guns Magazine, Art Photography and Figure Quarterly, the first two of which were titles of Publishers' Development Corp. While at PDC, Tajiri met Hugh Hefner, who worked in the circulation department by day and, later, in his kitchen on his nascent magazine by night. Both Art Photography and Figure Quarterly featured pinup and nude photography, and it's likely Tajiri's experience with such material helped Hefner see him as an attractive recruit.

In 1956 Tajiri signed on to be playboy's first photo editor, making him Hefner's "third important hire," according to Hefner biographer Steven Watts — presumably after art director Art Paul, who designed the Rabbit Head, and A.C. Spectorsky, a key editor. Shel Silverstein, in his 1964 three-part history of PLAYBOY, wryly imagined Hef's hiring process: "Here's how it will be…Spec is the associate publisher, so he gets $700 a week... Vic is promotion director, so he gets $500 a week...John is production manager, so he gets $400 a week...and Tajiri, you'll be photographing the girls, so you pay us $100 a week!"

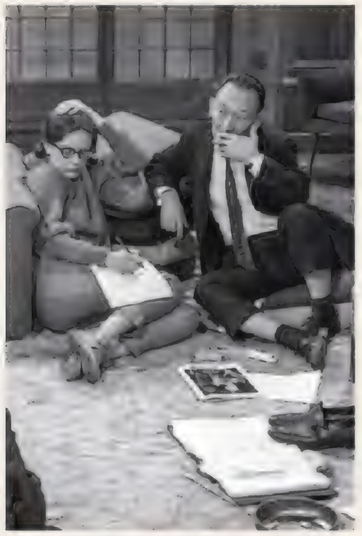
"When I arrived, the photo department was me, one file cabinet, a secretary and two desks," Tajiri once said. A decade later, he was managing a staff of dozens and a countrywide network of stringers. The photo facilities he developed at 919 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago included studio spaces, processing labs, a library and a full kitchen, where film was kept in the freezers. By 1968 the in-house lab was developing about 5,000 rolls of film on-site annually, with thousands more sent elsewhere.

In addition to producing images for the magazine, Tajiri oversaw the photo needs of the clubs, which numbered more than a dozen by 1965, and supervised the photography in VIP, the club magazine. Playboy's many other departments often required original shoots, including for advertising and mail-order products, the Playboy Press and Playboy's modeling agency. Eventually Tajiri was responsible for Playboy's three full-time studios in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles.

Naturally Tajiri's influence went beyond the images: In 1959, Hefner wanted to run a black-and-white photo taken at a nude-dancing establishment. "There's pubic hair evident in the picture. It's more than a shadow," Tajiri told Rolling Stone in 1973. But Hefner didn't want to retouch it, instead printing it very small. Tajiri was nervous about running afoul of obscenity laws — this was four years before the city of Chicago took Hefner to court for publishing photos of a nude Jayne Mansfield — and so, in Tajiri's words, he "shaped up the triangle where it was a little ragged. Made it look like a G-string." Tajiri even created a fake contact sheet. When the FBI came to investigate, they closely inspected the doctored duplicates but found nothing amiss.

His role at the magazine afforded him proximity to celebrities, including Peter Sellers, with whom he played poker at

***Opening page:** Tajiri and his staff photographers pose in a pajama-Pepsi-pipe tribute to Hefner, circa 1968, taken by Bill Arsenault. Clockwise from Tajiri: Mario Casilli, Pompeo Posar, Alexas Urba, Larry Gordon, J. Barry O'Rourke and Jerry Yulsman. **Above:** A June 1958 Playbill image of the dapper photo director.*



***Above:** Tajiri and associate picture editor Bev Chamberlain at a 1962 magazine meeting in the original Playboy Mansion in Chicago.*

Playboy's London casino, and John Cassavetes, who became a good friend, according to Tajiri's daughter, Rea Tajiri, a filmmaker. But not all high-profile interactions were so warm. In 1969 Hunter S. Thompson was working on a PLAYBOY story about French ski champ Jean-Claude Killy and his promotional tour for Chevrolet. Thompson and a member of the Chevy PR team were out drinking in Chicago when Tajiri swung by to ask the flak to bring Killy to the Mansion that evening for a photo shoot. The invite did not extend to Thompson. "The cocksucker told me to get lost," Thompson groused after the magazine killed his article.

By the early 1970s, Tajiri had begun to doubt the direction the magazine was headed. Penthouse, a raunchy imitator, was gaining popularity and pushing PLAYBOY into new territory. Hefner decided to print a photo revealing a peek of Playmate pubic hair in the January 1971 issue.

"I was very, very unhappy about it. I felt we were chasing an upstart," Tajiri later told British writer Russell Miller. Hefner eventually agreed, saying the magazine had temporarily "lost [its] compass," but by then Tajiri had left the company. Back on the West Coast, he contributed technical discussions and commentary sections to books by photographic heavyweights including Annie Leibovitz, Mary Ellen Mark, Will McBride and Bert Stern. In 1977 he wrote a thorough and entertaining biography of silent-screen star Rudolph Valentino for Bantam Books.

Life in Los Angeles helped Tajiri reconnect with his roots. "It was kind of like a homecoming for him," says Rea Tajiri. "He started working more in the Japanese American community." Among other collaborative projects, Vince edited the 1990 publication Through Innocent Eyes, a compilation of art, poetry and essays created by children incarcerated at the Poston camp.

Despite running the photography department of a magazine renowned for its imagery, Tajiri's name is not as well known as Hefner's or Paul's. Some of his former employees attribute that relative obscurity to his quiet nature and indifference to the spotlight. His grandson Vince Schleitwiler, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of Washington, sees cultural factors at play.

"The fact that he was kind of invisible but really influential is very much like a lot of other high-achieving Japanese Americans after the war — people who did really significant things in design and architecture, in the sciences and other professional fields," says Schleitwiler. "But they were not inclined to call attention to themselves, having experienced what having attention called to you was like."

Granddaughter Midori Tajiri, who lived in the Tajiri family house in L.A. in the late 1980s and early 1990s and is today a New Orleans artist, remembers how supportive Vince was of family and community. "He loved watching In Living Color because there was a Japanese hip-hop dancer. Every time they would come on, he would point her out," Midori says. "It was a big deal, because Japanese didn't always have a role in media and society when he was growing up."

Of course, it all comes back to the pictures. Tajiri died in 1993, but you can still glimpse his quiet brilliance on thousands of PLAYBOY pages — and in a remark he made to Popular Photography in 1968. "The most important thing in a photograph of a woman is her eyes," he said. "If a woman's eyes are not sharp, if they don't say anything, the picture doesn't run in playboy."

In the same interview, he also said, "Without photography, there would be no playboy." To which we might add — without Vince Tajiri, one can only wonder what playboy would have been. ■

Playboy's Rearview

Over 66 years and 761 issues, we've covered plenty of ground. From marijuana policy to Mideast mediation to feminist porn, here are a handful of contributions worth a second look

1950s

History unfolded in the March 1956 PLAYBOY with the three-page photo of nightie-clad Marian Stafford—the magazine's first literal Centerfold. Although Stafford captivates as a Playmate (below left), the talent behind the lens is equally notable: Ruth Sondak (left), who had been a World War II photojournalist. After the war Sondak became an agency photographer and later a freelancer, shooting portraits of such luminaries as Winston Churchill and Eleanor Roosevelt, among other assignments, across a decades-long career. Sondak's photos of antiwar protesters swarming the Pentagon in 1967 are perhaps her best known—excluding, of course, her pictorial of Stafford.

1960s

Frequent PLAYBOY contributor Alex Haley (below) phoned George Lincoln Rockwell, leader of the American Nazi Party, and asked him to sit for the April 1966 *Playboy Interview*. "After assuring himself that I wasn't Jewish, he guardedly agreed," Haley reported. "I didn't tell him I was a Negro." Upon Haley's arrival to the interview in Arlington, Virginia, Rockwell produced a pearl-handled revolver, displaying it on the arm of his chair. He needed it for protection from assassins, he insisted. Haley tolerated Rockwell's hostility with backbone and humor ("I've been called 'nigger' many times, Commander, but this is the first time I'm being *paid* for it," Haley said) to get his story—a fascinating and nearly 12,000-word conversation. Haley went on to pen the groundbreaking book *Roots* in 1976; Rockwell, it turns out, did need protection—an American Nazi shot him to death in 1967.

1970s

In January 1970, the *Dear Playboy* section was ablaze in reaction to the article that had sparked the PLAYBOY cover line A MEDICAL AUTHORITY CALLS FOR THE LEGALIZATION OF POT. Dr. Joel Fort had argued just that in *Pot: A Rational Approach*, setting in motion a deluge of letters from across the country. Reader response to the then controversial idea came from medical doctors, the assistant secretary of the Department of Health and even a former U.S. narcotics commissioner. Three members of the U.S. House of Representatives also wrote in—all supporting loosened drug laws. Fifty years later, most states allow some degree of usage, but marijuana remains illegal at the federal level.

1990s

Porn and feminism are not mutually exclusive, argued Nadine Strossen in the February 1995 *Forum*. Strossen (left)—the youngest president and first female leader of the American Civil Liberties Union and author of *Defending Pornography*—discussed censorship, sexuality and more with assistant editor Dorothy Atcheson. "If my so-called equality doesn't include freedom of expression, how am I equal?" Strossen asked. "And, if freedom of expression doesn't include the right to talk about sex, to look at pornography, to pose for it, to perform in it, to defend it, how do I have free speech?" Strossen, who led the ACLU for 17 years, is now a New York Law School professor; her work paved the way for today's sex-positive feminists.

1980s

Dick Gregory (left) is best known as a comedian—he got his big break at the Chicago Playboy Club in 1961—but he was also a committed activist, often using hunger strikes to draw attention to issues such as tribal rights, police brutality and apartheid. In 1980 he traveled to Iran, where the shah had recently been overthrown and 52 Americans had been captured, to "fast and pray for the safe resolution of the hostage crisis." Gregory, a convert to Islam, got an unexpected introduction to the Ayatollah Khomeini and even met with some of the revolutionaries who were holding the captives, presenting a three-stage plan under which he thought they could be freed. Nothing came of the proposal, but he walked away with an amazing tale he recounted in the December 1980 PLAYBOY feature *Inside Khomeini's Iran* (co-written with reporter Barbara Reynolds).

Explore these pieces and more at iPlayboy.com.

MARINA GRACE

Model @MARINAGRACEFUL

Photographed by ARTHUR ST. JOHN @ARTHURSTJOHN
HMUA TAYLOR JAZZ @TAYLOR_JAZZ
Styled @NATALIANAILA

Where were you born? Where do you live now?
I was born in Ukraine but I live in Los Angeles now.

How many different languages do you speak fluently?
I speak fluently English, Russian, Ukrainian.

Favorite style of music?
My favorite music is Mozart for babies and Trance/House Vocal.

Favorite movie of all time?
My favorite movies I would say The Princess Bride, Marry Poppins, Get Shorty, Avatar and A Star is Born.

Favorite nail polish color?
My favorite nail polish is French nail style.

Read the book or watch the movie?
I prefer to read the book, then watch the movie.

Do you prefer the beach or pool?
I prefer the beach.

Do you like to travel? Where is your favorite vacation destination?
Yes, I do love traveling. I would visit Italy and Spain.

Summer or Winter?
Love Summer

Describe your perfect man.
My perfect man has to possess a noble personality.

Describe your perfect date.
My perfect date would be to attend an open house and/or flying by helicopter to dinner.

Favorite body part on you? Favorite body part on a man?
My favorite body part eyes and hips. My favorite body part on him = eyes

Favorite sex position?
It always changes, so all.

Do you prefer to please or be pleased?
Both, but more pleased.

Tell us something about you not too many people know.
I am lonely...

Describe yourself using only 3 adjectives.
I am sensual, fervent and luminous.

If you can change any one thing about you, what would it be?
I would change myself in a way to be less emphatic

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Exercising and dieting.

Congrats on yet another Playboy feature! What does this mean to you?
It means I kissed my own soul.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
I see myself healthy, richer, more successful, looking beautifully younger. Having harmonic marriage and healthy kids. Being professional with time management, having profitable investments and passive income. I see my life with happy surprises and a better life than I can expect.

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THE PLAYBOY SYMPOSIUM

Is Hollywood keeping up with the changing mores of contemporary sexuality? In a time of simultaneous sex positivity and panic, we wanted to investigate how moviemakers are handling our country's sexual reawakening—especially when it comes to female sexuality on the big screen. So we tapped Franklin Leonard—founder of the Black List, Hollywood's heralded community of screenwriters and script buyers—for some help. What follows is a titillating survey of sex, cinema and the female gaze by the Black List's director of community, Kate Hagen. Accompanying Hagen's words: three never-beforepublished illustrations by artists exploring the act of sex, hand-selected by digital gallerist Love Watts.

WORDS BY **KATE HAGEN** ART CREATED BY **LOVE WATTS**

How were you first seduced by cinema?

My relationship with film began long before I could name the mesmeric desire I felt every time I turned myself over to 100 minutes of flickering passion on the screen. It wasn't until adolescence, when I started to actively seek out any movie on cable with a strong sexual content warning, that my nascent affection for film blossomed into an eternal obsession. And once I was finally left alone to watch what I wanted, I became a cinematic-sex sleuth.

I sought movies such as Looking for Mr. Goodbar, Bound, Wild at Heart, The Last Seduction and Crash (David Cronenberg's version, of course) solely for the sex. I became entranced not only with thrillingly new perspectives on romance, relationships and intimacy but with the complex emotional narratives around them. I became addicted to the nervous fluttering in my belly when the camera pushed in on two faces I loved, their bodies clutched in electrified anticipation before a climactic fuck. I perfected the art of searching TV Guide listings by actor to find the finest filth the Encore Romance channel could offer on a Saturday afternoon. (Remember Damage with Jeremy Irons and Juliette Binoche?) I spent hours of trigonometry class daydreaming about whichever actor beguiled me at the moment. That complete list is unfit to print in any medium, but I will admit I was hot for Alan Ruck long before Succession.

Even now, nothing thrills me more than a great sex scene. The problem is, the steamiest sex I've seen in years, outside of porn, occurred in the sixth episode of HBO's Euphoria — not in a theater. With its tender, trembling Halloween tryst between the characters played by Barbie Ferreira and Austin Abrams, Euphoria gave me something I'd never seen before, even as a slut for cinematic smut: a fat woman receiving oral pleasure to the point of climax without it being a punch line or a punishment for her or her paramour. While I was thrilled to be consumed by a scene starring someone who looks like me, it reminded me how long it had been since I'd seen a film that made me feel even remotely the same way.

A spectacular sex scene appeals to our lusting lizard brains, but everything that unfolds around the fucking is what invites audience members to invest and empathize with the characters: the tight clasp of Linda Hamilton's and Michael Biehn's hands during their pivotal coupling in The Terminator, or the sobering POV shots as Jennifer Jason Leigh bids adieu to her virginity in Fast Times at Ridgemont High. Through sex, we're able to gaze at our most beloved stars during moments of exceptional vulnerability, allowing deeper emotional connections — ones that can validate our own desires.

My love for on-screen erotica made me open to a variety of sexual perspectives long before I could experience them in reality. Even so, it took me three decades to feel represented sexually in film. If the most ubiquitous form of storytelling doesn't feature people to whom we can relate in their enjoyment of carnal satisfaction, how could we ever feel worthy of such a thing in real life? How could we believe we should ask for it?

I've been troubled by the state of sex in movies for the past few years. My fears are confirmed by data from IMDb: Only 1.21 percent of the 148,012 feature-length films released since 2010 contain depictions of sex. That percentage is the lowest since the 1960s. Sex in cinema peaked in the 1990s, the heyday of the erotic thriller, with 1.79 percent of all films featuring sex scenes. That half-point decline is massive in relative terms, considering almost four times as many films have been released in the 2010s as in the 1990s.

Studio releases simply aren't keeping up with the conversations about sex, gender and relationships that have been amplified by Generation Z's progressive attitudes and a #MeToo-driven cultural reckoning. Mainstream film surely isn't representative of the kinds of love and sex I experience in my life as a bisexual woman. We've only begun to flirt with respectful depictions of queer sex, kink and sex work on-screen, but those stories often live and die in the art houses. Countless nuanced perspectives remain unexplored by studios.

As I investigated the state of sex in cinema, I became frustrated with the attempts to assign blame for the slump. Scapegoats include the rise of streaming tube sites and smartphone dependence. But like the complexities of human attraction, the factors that led to the decline of sex in movies are intertwined with our own media history — both as individual viewers and as a collective audience that isn't getting laid as often as we did 20 years ago.

According to a November 2017 article in Archives of Sexual Behavior, American adults had sex about nine fewer times per year in the early 2010s than adults in the late 1990s. A 2016 LinkedIn study determined that entertainment is the top industry for young workers, which suggests we may be seeing less sex at the movies because Hollywood is full of undersexed millennials. (And why not blame another cultural catastrophe on millennials?) But that theory falls apart when you consider that the six major studios are run by baby boomers and Gen-Xers — who reportedly have more sex than the younger cohort. If industry gatekeepers are so sexually active, shouldn't there be more sex on release slates?

Consider the most successful erotic thriller ever made: Adrian Lyne's Fatal Attraction, which grossed more than $155 million domestically and was nominated for six Academy Awards, including best picture, in 1987. With its chaotic sex, Oscar nominated performance from Glenn Close ("I won't be ignored, Dan" still haunts me) and controversial climax, Fatal Attraction gained the kind of cultural ubiquity now reserved for franchises and IP-driven tentpoles, not middle-budget adult dramas.

To further contextualize Fatal Attraction's success, its adjusted domestic box office is nearly $360 million. If released in 2019, it would be the year's sixth-highest-grossing domestic release, behind four Disney films and one Sony/Marvel/Disney crossover. There's simply no way a movie like Fatal Attraction, with its languorous erotic intrigue and troubling morality, could compete with a Marvel giant in our current landscape, nor gain the same awards heat.

Beyond stories with explicit eroticism, five of the 100 all-time highest domestic grossers — Avatar, Titanic, Deadpool, Forrest

Opposite page: Senju, Seijo (Holy Woman), 2019. Digital painting.

Joyce Lee, Tiebreak, 2019.
Watercolor and colored
pencil on Kraft paper.

Gump, Skyfall and Twilight: Breaking Dawn-Part 2 — feature depictions of sex. At five percent, this list over-indexes when compared with the percentage of sex scenes in all movies, but with alien sex, superhero sex and vampire sex, these movies are not representative of anyone's sexual experiences (I imagine). What's more, not a single female director is responsible for these titles.

The exceptions to the major studios' sex strike are the adaptations of Fifty Shades of Grey, EL James's problematic fantasy about the luxury of heteronormative submission. The first Fifty Shades film — and the only one lensed by a woman, Sam Taylor-Johnson — grossed more than 10 times its $40 million budget. In total, all three films in the franchise made more than $1.3 billion worldwide, without showing a single penis.

Given the paucity of narratives about sexual fantasies centered on female desire, I can appreciate how the series pushed the envelope. But can the chemistry between Dakota Johnson and Jamie Dornan begin to compare with the incendiary attraction between Close and Michael Douglas? Pushing even further, the last notable theatrical release to receive an NC-17 rating was 2013's Blue Is the Warmest Color. Scenes of graphic unsimulated sex, such as those in Anatomy of Hell and Nymphomaniac, remain the territory of auteurs and international filmmakers who can leverage critical clout to get into festivals. Such releases sometimes make it to streaming platforms (for example, Gaspar Noé's Love, now on Netflix), but they aren't the cinephilic fodder they were just a decade ago.

As streaming platforms continue to dominate, new possibilities for adult content are emerging. Amazon's Jennifer Salke has partnered with Nicole Kidman to create a new house brand of "sexy date night" movies for Prime members. We have to consider that one of most plausible explanations for the cinematic- sex decline is the increase in sex on television. Should you ask your friends about their favorite recent depictions of sex, I imagine most will reference the small screen. Sex has made shows such as Vida, Outlander, Euphoria and Pose must-see television. The discourse around TV's steamiest moments — from bold thirst tweets to erotic GIFs — feels more pervasive than any cultural conversation about sex in film.

If we're living in the era of peak TV, shouldn't that suggest peak TV sex? Despite the earlier examples, not quite. Since 2000, sex scenes on television have tripled — to 0.06 percent. From 2010 to 2019, the percentage of movies with sex scenes was 20 times that of TV shows, at a time when television production outpaced film production by a ratio of about 13 to one. If we look back to the 1990s, the so-called peak decade for movie sex, data show that sex in film outpaced sex on TV by a staggering rate of about 60 to one.

While there may be more sex on TV today compared with 2000, halcyon days of XXX late-night programming have come to an end. In 2018, HBO pulled Cathouse, Real Sex and other adult programming from its broadcast and streaming services. This summer, the world lost erotic pioneer Patricia Louisianna Knop, who, along with her life and business partner, Zalman King, produced a carousel of pay-cable carnality throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Together they created the lushest sexual-fantasy films to hit the mainstream, including 9½ Weeks, Two Moon Junction and Wild Orchid, plus Red Shoe Diaries, which premiered on Showtime in 1992.

Red Shoe Diaries focused on the complexities of desire in a patriarchal, post-AIDS world. Bounty hunters, architects and doctors narrated their own stories of "love, passion, and betrayal" in letters sent to Red Shoes (played by David Duchovny), a wounded lothario who gets his kicks from their lurid tales. To kids of the 1990s, Red Shoe Diaries evokes sexy, synthwave role-play scenarios sponsored by Spencer's Gifts. But I would argue it had more progressive, thoughtful explorations of passion in its first season than in any premium-cable series since. It wasn't surprising, then, when I learned the show was produced in part by women, as was Real Sex. In the quarter-century since Knop and King's series debuted, we haven't come far in our depictions of non-heterosexual, non-vanilla sex in popular entertainment — or, more specifically, popular entertainment that isn't pornography.

To deny the essential role of sex in cinema is to deny a core truth.

I will admit cinematic sex satisfied my voyeurism only until I discovered the work of adult maven Joanna Angel, a former sex-advice columnist for Spin. Angel's brand of altporn features goth babes of all sizes along with approachable hunks such as Tommy Pistol. Through her Burning Angel banner, I realized that porn could be much more than vapid nymphets and hung studs, especially with a woman in the director's chair. Porn has always occupied a different part of my imagination than movie sex; the adult industry has its own celebrities, awards circuit and cinematic language that is both reflective of and totally unlike Hollywood. Equating the two industries undermines the talented performers in both worlds.

Hollywood's influence, and its current failure to present diverse perspectives on pleasure, is apparent on Adult Time, a paid subscription streaming service that bills itself as the Netflix of porn. Featuring more than 100 curated channels and 50,000 videos, Adult Time is the brainchild of Bree Mills, a queer female pornographer whose work includes everything from a lesbian themed Miami Vice homage to a trans reimagining of Thelma & Louise to a kinky parody of the musical Annie.

Signing up for a trial of Adult Time this spring was the most revelatory experience I've had with porn since discovering Burning Angel. There, I watched real bodies — bodies with acne, cellulite and stretch marks; bodies historically valued as less than desirable in mainstream storytelling of all kinds; bodies denied on-screen pleasure in Hollywood as well as adult films — experiencing real bliss. Scouring Adult Time's library, which includes thousands of scenes from porn's golden age, it's apparent there are more inclusive, feminine gazes in adult content than ever before. You just have to be willing to look beyond Pornhub.

More than half the nominees for best director at the 2019 XBIZ Awards were women, which represents far more gender diversity than any directing category during major awards season. Since the 1990s peak of cinematic sex, porn made for, by and about women (and trans, nonbinary and other gender-nonconforming folks) has unquestionably improved and diversified. This was long overdue, and I wouldn't trade porn's progress for better Hollywood-produced erotica, but mainstream filmmakers could learn how to frame, block and light cinematic sex scenes from Adult Time.

Depending on whom you ask, valuations of the global adult industry range from $5 billion to $97 billion. Pornhub reported 33.5 billion global visits in 2018; if we compare this to 2018's global box office returns of $41.7 billion (assuming the average movie ticket costs $10), we can estimate that about 4 billion movie tickets were sold in the same time frame. Adult industry aggregator MindGeek (which owns Pornhub, Redtube and YouPorn, among other sites) is currently mining millions of data points from users to craft new content by algorithm, just as Netflix did with Maniac and Black Mirror: Bandersnatch. Whether this optimized adult content resonates with viewers is yet to be seen, but for me, returning to the Wild West of free pornography after my Adult Time trial felt like eating Vienna sausage after two weeks of bingeing Wagyu beef.

Innovations in the adult industry have also created new technological concerns for any performer who appears nude or simulates sex. A Pandora's box of deepfake videos and other nascent forms of digital manipulation popped open around 2017 and immediately became popular as a way to reimagine adult content. On Pornhub, a search for "deepfakes" yields no results, but on Redtube and YouPorn, a dozen videos, each buried deep within the uncanny valley, surface. They became harder to watch with each frame, but one clip in particular, starring a superheroine, shook me to my core. If I didn't know better, it would be difficult to believe it was fake.

For now, the celebrity deepfake market seems focused on exploiting women. When I searched through one such site, not a single video starred a male actor. Female nudity in film has plummeted since its peak of appearing in about six percent of all films in the 1990s to less than three percent of all films in the past 20 years. This still eclipses male nudity, rarely fullfrontal, which appears in only 1.67 percent of all films since 1950. The imbalance of gendered nude scenes was promoted in DeepNude, an app launched last summer that virtually undressed women using neural network technology from online nude photos. While DeepNude was taken down within a day, and measures such as California's proposed SB 564 (backed by the Screen Actors Guild) could prohibit the creation and sharing of digitally rendered sex scenes without the performers' consent, no single federal law protects against deepfake pornography.

Opposite page: Laura Berger, Flower, 2019. Acrylic on canvas.

The war over how our most intimate moments are digitally disseminated will be waged in our lifetime, with private citizens soon to face the same concerns as celebrities when it comes to how they're represented online. In the meantime, Hollywood has responded to performers' concerns about filming sex scenes with the creation of a new crew position: the intimacy coordinator. Just as stunt coordinators ensure that a balletic action sequence won't injure actors, an intimacy coordinator ensures that actors feel safe and comfortable while filming intimate scenes.

Alicia Rodis, co-founder of Intimacy Directors International, is currently working with SAG-AFTRA to create guidelines for shooting sex scenes while overseeing the sets of shows like The Deuce. Euphoria's intimacy coordinator, Amanda Blumenthal, no doubt had a hand in creating the scene between Ferreira and Abrams that had me scouring Tumblr like it was 2007. With the of-age actors playing high school juniors, the scene could have read as exploitative or gratuitous. Instead — thanks to Blumenthal's presence, I imagine — their coupling felt raw and relatable. It thrilled me on a visceral level.

When I was the age of Ferreira's character on Euphoria, I was terrified someone would find out about my film-sex fascination. I didn't want to be the stereotypical hypersexual fat woman, who'd been revealed to me in films like Road Trip as the only option for my sexuality. As I've grown more comfortable with my sexuality (and seen it reflected in Shrill, My Mad Fat Diary and other media), I feel grateful for my early erotic adventures across the cinematic canon. Through all sorts of viewing I learned to appreciate every subtle gesture of affection between two actors pretending to be in love, and I came to crave the tactile, electrifying intimacy captured by films such as The Piano and Morvern Callar.

The feelings-first fervor from my adolescence never fully dissipated. I still seek sex scenes that challenge what I think I want from romance, especially as my own sexual spectrum continues to expand. Hollywood may be failing when it comes to depicting the many facets of contemporary sexuality, but we have also moved beyond the regressive sexual politics of Manhattan and Disclosure (think Tangerine, The Miseducation of Cameron Post and Professor Marston and the Wonder Women). As more women step behind the camera, we could soon see sex scenes from radical new perspectives that will shift how we think about sex at the movies forever — as long as Hollywood is willing to showcase them.

When we talk about diverse and inclusive storytelling, it must include depictions of our sexual lives and desires. To deny the essential role of sex in cinema is to deny a core truth about why we watch in the first place: desire. Desire to live a more thrilling life. Desire to experience something that fascinates us but is too frightening to touch in the real world. Whether we admit it or not, this is what keeps us coming back to the cinema. Great sex scenes project the secret, unspoken desires hiding in a viewer's heart onto a screen in front of them. Sex at the cinema has taught me more about my own desires than I could ever have imagined. I can't wait to be surprised and shocked by the next era. ■

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